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ABSTRACT

The Particularity of Christ and the Plurality of Religions:

A Dialectical Paradigm for Developing

A Christian Theology of Religions

Narendra Singh

The purpose of this dissertation is to interpret and evaluate contemporary representative proposals for a Christian theology of religions on the basis of the dialectical relational paradigm the historic Christian church has used in formulating its doctrine and practice. In the process, a viable Christian theology of religions is developed congruent with this historical model.

The author demonstrates in chapter two that the dialectical relational paradigm is a historical reality. The church has again and again resorted to retaining dialectical tensionality in resolving christological, theological, and ecclesiological issues. Chapter two thus functions not only as a model of dialectical tension to evaluate the positions discussed in chapters three, four, and five, but also gives historical foundation to the dialectical theology of religions developed in chapter six.

This study demonstrates that three prominent approaches to a Christian theology of religions--religious pluralism, Christian exclusivism, and ecumenical inclusivism resolve the dialectical relation between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions.

The study focuses on two main contenders for each position. John Hick and Paul Knitter represent the pluralistic position; Hendrik Kraemer and Ronald Nash represent the exclusivistic position; and Karl Rahner and Clark Pinnock represent the inclusivistic position.

The author discusses the pluralistic theology of religions in chapter three, the exclusivistic theology of religions chapter four, and the inclusivistic theology of religions in chapter five. Each chapter focuses on revelation, christology, and soteriology. Each chapter concludes with a brief evaluation based on the model of historical reality of dialectical tension. In an attempt to construct a dialectical Christian theology of religions, the author shows in chapter six that a dialectical Christian theology of religions, as opposed to the other three types of Christian theology of religions, is congruent with the historical model of dialectical tension. Chapter seven provides a missiological strategy congruent with the dialectical theology of religions of chapter six, arguing that dialogical discernment holds both the proclamational and dialogical natures of Christian mission together.

The following conclusions emerge from this study: (1) God is open to the people of other religions. (2) Religious pluralism contributes to the fuller understanding of the whole truth about Jesus Christ. (3) Christian theology can become relevant in a religiously pluralistic world without losing its proper understanding of the mystery of God in Christ authenticated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (4) The church experiences God's revelation both in Jesus Christ

and in other religions. Dialogical discernment is a useful approach for relating to the people of other religions.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

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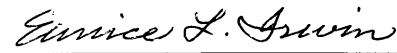
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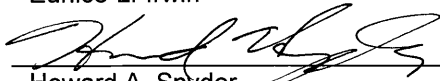
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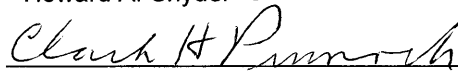
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Religious pluralism has been regarded by many theologians and missiologists as the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith at the beginning of the twenty first century. Max Warren, former general secretary of the Church Missionary Society in London, predicted in 1958 that "the impact of agnostic science will turn out to have been as child's play compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faith of other men" (Cited in Smith, 1972:121). Similarly, sociologist Peter Berger claims that "modernity has plunged religion into a very specific crisis, characterized by secularity, to be sure, but characterized more importantly by pluralism" (1979:xi). Berger contends that the contestation between the major religions, especially those emanating from the Far East and the Indian subcontinent, will be important themes for theology in the foreseeable future (1979:xi).

Missiologist Gerald H. Anderson asserts that the most critical aspect of the task of forging a viable theology of mission today "deals with the Christian attitude toward religious pluralism and the approach to people of other faiths" (1988:114). In The Good News of the Kingdom, published in 1993, Anderson again asserts, "No issue in missiology is more important, more difficult, more controversial, or more divisive for the days ahead than the theology of religions" (Van Engen 1993:200). Warren was absolutely right, says Anderson. This is the theological issue for mission in the 1990s and into the twenty first century

(1993:201). Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten, writing about the situation in the 1990s, says, "The question whether there is the promise of salvation in the name of Jesus, and in no other name, is fast becoming a life-and-death issue facing contemporary Christianity. In the churches this issue will become the test of fidelity to the gospel, a matter of *status confessionis* more urgent than any other" (1992:89). David Tracy asserts: "There is no more difficult or more pressing question on the present theological horizon than that of interreligious dialogue" (1990:27). These are stirring statements. It is indeed the challenge to Christian theology posed by religious pluralism cannot be minimized.

The Problem of Religious Pluralism

Though religious pluralism is not a new phenomenon, nonetheless it has never been so globally felt as in the past ten years or so. Whereas religious pluralism was once considered an Indian phenomenon; it is now recognized as a phenomenon of global magnitude. Since, however, religious pluralism has been part of India's life and history for millennia, India can be considered a noteworthy representative of religious pluralism.

Religious Pluralism in India

Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism with all their subsects have all existed side by side in India for centuries. With the arrival of Islam, problems became more acute. Some religious individuals tried to go beyond the particularities of Hindu sects and of Islam to establish religious groups open to all. These religious groups were theologically and philosophically based on the idea of the existence

of one God, who is the God and Father of both Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, when Christianity reached India, theologically or philosophically a new problem did not arise (Wilfred 1992:69-70) until some of the Hindus, steeped in their traditions and sensing the danger to their religion and way of life, reacted sharply to the influence of Christianity's exclusivity and intolerance. Their answer to the Christian challenge was reformation and revivalism. They opposed Christianity chiefly because, in their view, the Christian missionaries were the agents of a foreign religion and culture (Wilfred 1992:69).

Hinduism. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, two forms have emerged within Hinduism. These two forms are commonly known as *renaissance* and *resurgence*. The former is identified with the reformation of Hinduism from within in order to create relevance in its religious and moral belief. The latter is identified with the revival within Hinduism to preserve the original Hindu system.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833 AD), known as the father of the Indian Renaissance, transformed Hinduism by making the Upanishads his basis both for emphasizing monotheism and also for the moral regeneration of Hinduism.

In the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948 AD) turned, like Roy, to the moral regeneration of Hinduism, but made the Bhagvad Gita his basis. Since the renaissance both the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gita have become *sruti* (revealed scriptures) for Hindus. This renaissance was above all a renaissance in thought and is still a living, ongoing movement (Wilfred 1992:69).

An important development occurred when Swami Vivekananda (1862-

1902), at the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893, sought to project Hinduism as a universal religion. As a result, Hinduism became a missionary religion. The Ramakrishna Mission organized by Swami Vivekananda has become a counterpart of Christian mission, both in form and content. It involves philanthropic work, corporate discipline, religious teaching, and training of missionaries (Sumithra 1990:15).

Following Vivekananda, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), the former President of India, stressed the religious resurgence of Hinduism and saw in Hinduism the ultimate, perfect religion.

Swami Akhilananda The Hindu View of Christ (1949) represents the extensive missionary outreach of Hinduism in recent years, which reaches beyond the boundaries of his country, India. A prominent Indian theologian, Stanley J. Samartha, writes that Swami Akhilananda "represents the world mission of modern Hinduism, confident of its own strength and self-sufficiency, now carrying its message to lands which were so far used to *send* missions, not to *receive* them" (Samartha 1974:61).

Islam. In Islam also one can see both renaissance and resurgence. The petro-dollar-rich Arab countries are regularly pouring enormous amounts of money into India and other countries for Islamization. The Ahmadiyya movement of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908) is a missionary Muslim sect. At the present time, the Indian Muslim community is not yet *Dar-ul-Islam* (House of Islam) but is still considered *dar-ul-Harb* (House of war). However, events are moving quickly

toward that goal (Sumithra 1990:19).

An overview. Hinduism is by far the most important religion in India, followed by Islam. Both Hinduism and Islam are undergoing rapid changes in order to make their beliefs, claims, and practices meaningful and appealing to their adherents and to people of the Christian faith. This is a new phenomenon today.

In addition to Hinduism and Islam, there are also Sikh and Christian religions in India. Each of these is different from the others in origin, in purpose, in development, and in the conceptual tools. The existence of these co-existent yet diverse religious faiths makes India a representative of religious pluralism. Nevertheless, a religious leap from New Delhi to New York takes a "U turn" to create a new identity in the religious history of "supposedly" Christian America. It is precisely this "U turn" that makes religious pluralism new and such a challenge in North America to Christian faith.

Religious Pluralism in America

In this period of history, religious pluralism is not only an Indian reality, it is also becoming a global reality. Today the western world is characterized not only by churches, but also by the emergence of Muslim mosques, Hindu temples, Sikh gurdwaras, and Buddhist temples. Immigrants in the West have influenced traditional Christianity. Today Christianity, whether in the West or in the East, is in the midst of a religiously plural world.

What is new today in both the West and the East is that the results of an

unavoidable exposure to many different religious traditions has brought a growing awareness of religious plurality and claims. It is virtually impossible today to live in a major city and not have any contact with some aspect of a major non-Christian religion (Netland 1991:4).

There are, for example, an estimated three million Muslims and over six hundred mosques in the United States alone (Muck 1988:15). In 1982 the Islamic Society of North America, an umbrella organization for five smaller Islamic societies, was formed, thereby providing greater unity and cohesion for the movement of Islam in North America. Muslims are generally zealous in spreading their faith in the West and have targeted in particular university populations as the focus of *da'wah*, or the propagation of Islam. Robert C. Douglas, former director of the Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies, reports that at a recent conference in Los Angeles, Muslims announced a goal of winning fifty to seventy million Americans to Islam (Douglas 1988:15). Dr. Yvonne Haddad, an Islamicist at the University of Massachusetts, says, "Those who have studied Muslims in the United States estimate that if the Muslim community continues to grow at the present rate, Islam will be the second largest religion in the United States by 2015, overtaking Judaism" (Haddad cited in Hart 1988:6).

Muslims are not alone in seeing the West as a mission field. An estimated three to five million Buddhists live in the United States. The Nichiren Shoshu sect of Japanese Buddhism alone claims 500,000 members (Muck 1988:15). In 1987 forty-five American Buddhist organizations united together to form the American

Buddhist congress to speak out on national issues from a Buddhist perspective.

The Buddhist penetration of western society reached a new peak when the Institute for Buddhist Studies, the first professional institute of higher education created by a Buddhist organization in the United States, in 1985 established an affiliate relationship with the prestigious Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California (Richardson 1985:xiv).

Hindus also are becoming increasingly prominent in North America. More than forty Hindu temples are scattered throughout the United States from major urban centers such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, to smaller communities such as Aurora, Illinois, and Springfield, Virginia (Muck 1988:15).

North America is not alone in experiencing the reality of religious plurality. In France Islam is second only to Roman Catholicism, with Protestantism in third place. In Britain there are large numbers of Muslims as well as sizable Hindu and Sikh minorities. London is today one of the world's most pluralistic cities; more than one hundred and seventy languages are spoken by pupils of London's schools (Wood 1988:923-924). Robert Douglas tells of a Muslim leader at an Islamic conference who stated: "Unless we win London over to Islam we will fail to win the whole of the Western world" (1988:15).

The influence of these religions is so great upon belief systems that The Los Angeles Times religion writer Russell Chandler reported a decade ago that "roughly 30 million Americans--about one in four--now believe in reincarnation" (1988:20). A 1978 Gallup poll indicated that 10 million Americans were engaged

in some aspect of Eastern mysticism and nine million in spiritual healing (1988:21).

The New York Times News Service reports that "Hotel Bibles share rooms with many other books"; the Gideon Bibles in hotels no longer have the field to themselves. "In a growing number of hotels the Bible now keeps company with the Book of Mormon, the Teachings of Buddha. . . . This reflects the fact that in this diversified culture, the Christian Bible is no longer the single religious text," said Leander Keck, Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology at the Yale Divinity School (Lexington Herald-Leader 1995:A3).

However, what seems to be new in the twentieth century, especially in this decade, is the growing number of Christians and theologians, such as John Hick, Paul Knitter, Raimundo Panikkar, and Stanley J. Samartha, proposing a pluralistic theology of religions. This challenge posed to Christian witness and theology is significantly new.

John Hick, a British Protestant philosopher and theologian, is a major proponent of the pluralistic theology of religions. He argues that Christians need to undergo a Copernican revolution in their thinking about other religions. This demands, he says, "a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered to a God-centered model of the universe of faiths" (1973:131). Hick's theocentric model contends for many ways to the center (Knitter 1985:145). Hick affirms that one "ultimate reality" is behind all the religions, and therefore every religious expression is relatively true. Every religious expression is true to its

adherents to be a way to the ultimate reality without denying the other ways. For Hick, since all religions are valid paths to “God” or “Reality,” a pluralistic theology of religions is inevitable.

Background to the Problem: Three Popular Approaches to Theology of Religions

Both in the East and in the West, Christian and non-Christian scholars have asked the following questions: Why are there so many diverse religions? If Christianity is the true religion, why is it that so much of the world rejects it in favor of diametrically opposing religious traditions? Is it theologically and morally acceptable to maintain that one religion is uniquely true and that the others are at best incomplete or even false? Why is Jesus Christ unique and not Krishna or Mohammed? Are Hindus or Muslims or Buddhists really damned because they are not Christians? Will the loving God condemn those who did not believe in Jesus Christ even if they were devoted to their faith? Is anything of value in other religions, or are they the products of human imagination? In other words, these questions are soteriological in nature. Is there salvation in other religions? Three approaches offering answers to such questions have been identified.

The three approaches, exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism, differ in their understanding of Christ and mission in relation to other religions. These three approaches can be summarized in brief overview.

Exclusivism

Exclusivism means that the central claims of Christianity are true, and no salvation is possible in other religious traditions (Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian

Message in a Non-Christian World, 1938). Exclusivists speak of the finality of Christ and the final and absolute revelation of God in Christ. Thus they minimize God's work in other religions. The exclusivists, even if they acknowledge the revelation of God outside Christianity, deny its salvific efficacy.

Pluralism

Pluralism rejects that God has revealed Godself in any unique or definitive sense in Jesus Christ; God is actively revealing Godself in all religious traditions (John Hick, God Has Many Names, 1982; The Metaphor of God Incarnate, 1995a). The pluralists deny any special or normative status of Christ and Christianity and thus assert salvific efficacy in other religions.

Ecumenical Inclusivism

Ecumenical inclusivism refers to conciliar and evangelical versions of inclusivism. Conciliar inclusivism means that God's revelation in Christ is definitive, but God's salvation is available through non-Christian religions as well (Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations Vol.5, 1966). The conciliar inclusivists see him as the *cosmic Christ*. Christ is hidden in other religions. People of faith in other religions are not lost, but are *anonymous Christians*. Seeing Christ as bringing salvation in other religions, the inclusivists likewise nullify God's revelation already at work in other religions independent of Christ. But unlike pluralists and exclusivists, conciliar inclusivists maintain the presence of Christ in all religions.

Evangelical inclusivism refers to the position that no one can be saved

without Christ, but the knowledge of Christ is not necessary for salvation (Clark Pinnock, A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions 1992). The evangelical inclusivists maintain that God accepts *holy pagans* in Christ without their ever having heard of or responded to Christ himself. God might or might not use religions as means of mediating grace.

All three of these approaches appear to resolve the tension between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions. The exclusivistic approach contends for discontinuity and eliminates tensionality. The inclusivistic approach proposes continuity and synthesizes tensionality. The pluralistic approach argues for plurality and relativizes tensionality.

Statement of the Problem

With increased awareness of the global reality of religious pluralism, there appears to be a *tensionality* between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions. When tensionality is perceived as a dialectical conflict, the attempt is to resolve it. Conversely, when tensionality is perceived as a dialectical relation, the attempt is to retain it. I choose to develop the second mode for the construction of a Christian theology of religions. The research problem can be stated as follows:

This study interprets and evaluates contemporary representative proposals for a Christian theology of religions on the basis of a dialectical relational paradigm. In the process, a viable Christian theology of religions is developed congruent with the historical model of a dialectical relational

paradigm.

The study demonstrates that the three approaches to a Christian theology of religions show a dialectical conflict while ignoring the dialectical relation between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions. The study shows that the dialectical relational paradigm I am proposing remains true to both the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions, offering a viable alternative for developing a faithful and relevant Christian theology of religions while retaining the mission mandate.

Dialectical Relational Method

A dialectical relational paradigm functions in this research study as an overarching methodology for developing a Christian theology of religions.

A dialectical relation may refer to two foundational elements or issues paradoxically opposed to each other, seen as north and south poles that never find a meeting point. Another dialectical relationship is the familiar Hegelian triadic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.

In this study, however, I propose the use of "dialectic" not in the usual sense of paradox and collision or synthesis but in the sense of the relationship between two fundamental elements which, though they appear to be in opposition, are so related as to be in dynamic tension with each other. That is to say, their opposition is dynamically related to some commonality. Dialectical relation does not, however, mean that both the foundational horizons or elements are one and the same. An example of such a dialectical relation is the

human and divine natures of Christ, which though they appear to be incompatible, are related to each other in dynamic tension. God's truth is so profound that the church has tended historically at first to see only parts of it, but gradually has come to a deeper insight that holds together dialectically views previously seen as incompatible.

In the theology of religions, the two primary responses to the challenge of religious pluralism apparently conflict. Usually when two foundational horizons such as exclusivism and pluralism conflict, the normal solution is to choose one. This dialectical paradigm can also function as a method to retain the tension between these two perspectives.

To maintain the dialectical relation between the two foundational horizons of a Christian theology of religions, one needs to review and revise the understanding of divine revelation. A fresh interpretation of divine revelation will help us understand who God is in relation to Christ; who Christ is in relation to other religions; and what needs to be a proper Christian response to the people of other faiths. In other words, this study must grapple with particularism, pluralism, and evangelism.

A dialectical relational paradigm therefore functions in this study as a methodology for developing a Christian theology of religions.

The historical reality of dialectical tension becomes a model for interpreting and evaluating contemporary proposals for a theology of religions and as well for interpreting the cardinal tenets of this research study, namely,

particularism and pluralism.

Interpretation of these proposals will involve three basic analytical operations. The first analytical operation is to describe what the proponents of the theologies of religions are saying; the second is to evaluate whether what they are saying is correct; the third is to state what I attempt to say as possibly correct.

Chapter two demonstrates that the church has again and again resorted to what I am calling dialectical relation in responding to challenges from its cultural and religious context. For instance, Chalcedonian Christology retains a tensionality between the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. Enlightenment theology avoids the perceived dichotomy between the transcendence and the immanence of God. Modern ecclesiology stresses maintaining the relationship between proclamation and social action. Post-modern missiology must then construct a Christian theology of religions not by resolving but by retaining the tensionality between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions. Healthy dialectical relation exists between the two, and must be maintained in order to develop a Christian theology of religions.

In this research study I have interpreted and evaluated the issues involved in Christian particularism and religious pluralism from the new perspective of a dialectical relational paradigm for developing a viable Christian theology of religions.

Focus and Limitations

The nature of my study required that I collect my data through library research using both primary and secondary sources related to the topic. The data for my research study is taken from the writings of the major theologians, missiologists, and historians of religion.

The focus of this study is not a detailed comparative study of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, and not a phenomenological, sociological, psychological or philosophical study of these religions. The focus is on developing a Christian theology of religions. I confine my research to a Christian theology of religions, which is generally described in terms of three positions: pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism. I focus on two main contenders for each position. The selection is mainly based on their popularity for the position they contend. There are two contenders for each position, mainly representing older and younger generations. John Hick, a Protestant, and Paul Knitter, a Catholic, represent the pluralistic position; Hendrik Kraemer and Ronald Nash, both Protestant, represent the exclusivistic position; and Karl Rahner, a Catholic, and Clark Pinnock, a Protestant, represent the inclusivistic position. Religious plurality can refer to many religions, but I limit applications of my study to Hinduism and Islam. Since religious pluralism is both a local and a global reality, my context is both India and America.

Procedure

Chapter two will demonstrate that the dialectical relational paradigm is a historical reality. The church has again and again resorted to retaining tensionality for resolving christological, theological, and ecclesiological issues. This chapter thus functions not only as a model of dialectical tension to evaluate the positions discussed in Chapters three, four, and five, but also gives historical foundation to the dialectical theology of religions developed in Chapter six. Chapter three discusses the pluralistic theology of religions propounded by John Hick and Paul Knitter, Chapter four, the exclusivistic theology of Religions contended for by Hendrik Kraemer and Ronald Nash, and Chapter five, the inclusivistic theology of religions advocated by Karl Rahner and Clark Pinnock. Each chapter focuses on revelation, christology, and soteriology. Each chapter concludes with a brief evaluation based on the model of historical reality of dialectical tension in Chapter two. In an attempt to construct a dialectical Christian theology of religions, Chapter six shows that a dialectical Christian theology of religions, as opposed to the other three types of Christian theologies of religions, is congruent with the model of historical reality of dialectical tension. Chapter seven provides missiological implications congruent with the dialectical theology of religions of Chapter six. It is argued that the model of dialogical discernment holds both the proclamational nature and the dialogical nature of Christian mission together.

CHAPTER 2

Dialectical Tension: A Historical Reality

The study of church history reveals that the church went through a rigorous process of debates and discussions over the centuries in order to formulate and reformulate biblically faithful and contextually relevant theological doctrines for the church. In this section I will bring to discussion four such theological issues and attempt to show that the church has in each case resorted to what I am calling dialectical relation in responding to the challenges from its cultural and religious context.

Christological Tension: Divine or Human: Early Church Period

Christological discussion revolves most importantly around the issues of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. How can Jesus Christ be considered both divine and human at the same time? Who is Jesus Christ? is the Christological question. Is he God or human? This issue occupied the early church for many years and led to the formulation of the Chalcedonian definition which affirmed not an either-or but a both-and Christology.

The doctrinal formulations that took place in the ecumenical councils, such as the councils of Nicea (325 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD) have become normative for the Christian church. The question can be raised of how it was possible to formulate a unified Christology at Chalcedon. There appears to be a developmental process from Jewish tradition to Christian-Jewish faith and from Christian-Jewish faith to Christian-Jewish-Hellenistic faith (Macquarrie 1990:148ff).

That is, the person and work of Jesus Christ was first of all expressed and interpreted in the categories of the Jewish tradition. Then in the second century, when the mission of the church was expanded to the Gentiles, Christian doctrine, especially Christology was reformulated in the thoughts and terminology of Hellenistic culture. Finally, when the Christian faith confronted educated people influenced by platonic and stoic teachings, apologists employed the Greek-philosophical system to defend the Christian faith and make it meaningful to the people of that era.

The incorporation of Greek philosophical ideas into Christianity for the purpose of expressing and defending the Christian faith and for modifying and formulating Christian doctrine was not a regrettable fact. The period between the last writings of the New Testament and the great councils of Nicea and Chalcedon was a time of intellectual wrestling with the Christian faith. The early Christian thinkers immediately following the New Testament period began to formulate Christology in the thought forms of their own Greco-Roman world.

There were two influential centers of Christian theology. The School of Alexandria upheld the divinity of Christ, while the School of Antioch defended the humanity of Christ. The trends in the early church appeared as one-sided solutions to the Christological problem of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. The *Ebionites*¹ regarded Jesus as the elect of God, the true prophet, but denied that he was divine (McKim 1988:26). The Ebionites perceived Jesus as a man who was adopted by God at the time of his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon

him. This view later came to be known as *adoptionism* (1988:26). The Ebionites affirmed the human nature of Jesus Christ and denied his divine nature.

At the opposite extreme to the Ebionites, the *docetists*,² denied that Jesus was human. Christologically, the docetists perceived Jesus as appearing to be human, but claimed Jesus was not fully human. For docetists, Jesus' humanity and suffering were unreal. He was a spirit. Justin Martyr (100-165 AD), a Christian apologist in the second century, described the docetic view, "There are some who declare that Jesus Christ did not come in flesh but only as spirit, and exhibited an appearance (Gk. *phantasian*) of flesh" (cited in McKim 1988:26). The docetists affirmed the divine nature and denied the human nature of Jesus Christ.

A third group, the *gnostics*, philosophically created a dichotomy between spirit and matter. The gnostics taught that spirit was good and matter evil (Kelly 1978:141). Based on this philosophy, gnostic Christology held that the divine Christ united with the historical person Jesus of Nazareth between his baptism and his death (McKim 1988:27). The gnostics perceived the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ to be in juxtaposition.

Faced with this Christological problem, second century Christian theologians such as Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen attempted to address the issue of the relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father in the light of Greek philosophy.

Justin Martyr saw Jesus Christ as the pre-existent *Logos* (Word) who became human by being born of the Virgin Mary (Kelly 1978:145-48). While in

human flesh, he argued, Jesus did not cease to exist as the Logos. The Logos is the mediator between God and human beings. However, since the Logos was brought forth by God, Justin maintained the Logos was inferior to the one God (McKim 1988:27).

It took almost four hundred years of Christological problems for the early church to come to a consensus on what the Bible says about the nature of Jesus Christ as truly God and truly human.

Ebionism, adoptionism, Arianism and other christologies emphasized the humanity of Jesus Christ and de-emphasized his divinity. On the other hand, docetism, Apollinarianism, monophysitism along with others stressed the divinity of Jesus Christ and neglected his humanity.

Irenaeus of Lyons (130-200 AD), in the second century, stressed the unity of the two natures of Jesus. Irenaeus rejected the gnostic view, which separated the divine Christ from the human Jesus. Against the docetist view, Irenaeus maintained Jesus Christ was truly God and truly human.

In the third century, the challenge to christology came from *adoptionism* and *modalism*. The former maintained that Jesus was a mere man on whom the Holy Spirit descended and that he gradually moved into deity. The latter held to the oneness of God and the full deity of Christ, but sacrificed all distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Both modalism and adoptionism tried to preserve either the deity or humanity of Christ to the exclusion of the other.

Tertullian (160-225 AD), a Latin-speaking North African Church Father,

perceived the danger of the one-sided emphasis of both adoptionism and modalism. He asserted the two natures of Christ, and explained that Christ is a distinct person but of the same essence as the Father. Tertullian, differing from adoptionism and modalism, asserted that both substances, divine and human, maintained their own distinctive qualities and activities when they were united in Christ (McKim 1988:30). Both natures belonged to one and the same person. Jesus Christ unites divinity and humanity in himself without confusion and separation.

The Arian controversy engulfed the church from 318-325 AD. Arius (born between 260 and 280; died 336) challenged the church's Christology which affirmed Christ is being of the same essence as God. He began with the premise of God's absolute transcendence. God's being or essence cannot be shared or participated in. If someone shared God's essence, then there would be more than one God. These premises led him to conclude that the Logos was created by God. The Son owes his existence to the Father. God and the Logos are of two different essences. The Logos became flesh by entering into the creature Jesus, but it did not become human. This made Jesus superior to all other creatures, but a creature like all others. This means that Jesus was different from God and also from other human beings. Arius contended that the Word is God or that Jesus is the Son of God is merely a courtesy title (Kelly 1978:229). By advocating the Son as a created being, not of the same essence as the Father, Arius challenged the christological affirmation of the church that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly

human.

The church responded to the challenge by affirming a two nature christology and thus condemning Arius' one-sided christology. The Council of Nicea in 325 AD affirmed that the Son is begotten and is of the same substance as the Father and the Spirit. Athanasius, in *Against the Arians*, argued that in Christ there was a perfect union of divine and human without any confusion (McKim 1988:32-33).

The Nestorian controversy of 428 AD challenged the responses of earlier periods. It was a time of testing for the church either to succumb to the pressure of a dichotomized Christology or to stand for a two nature christology.

McKim points out that between the Nestorian controversy of 428 AD and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, there were two major types of Christology (1988:37): (1) the Word-flesh Christology, which focused more on the divinity of Christ and less on the Logos as the human dimension of Jesus, and (2) the Word-human Christology, which placed a greater emphasis on the humanity of Christ, giving less importance to the Logos as the divine dimension of Jesus. Both views had their positive and negative aspects. Each of the views represented only an aspect of Christ's nature. There was a great need for a formulation that represented both the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ.

Nestorius (born after 351; died after 451), an Antiochene monk who became Bishop of Constantinople in 428 AD, attempted to address the issue of the two natures in one person. Nestorius argued that Christ is one person and this

one person is the result of a coming together of two distinct natures. Christ as one person remained twofold in nature. This means that Nestorius, instead of seeing two natures dialectically related to each other, kept the natures apart.

Consequently, he assigned Christ's human actions, experiences, and sufferings to his human nature, and the divine actions such as healing, and resurrection to his divine nature.

Cyril (died 444 AD) bishop of Alexandria, together with the whole church, rejected Nestorius' formulation of Christology. Nestorius' view of Christology maintained that the divine Logos remained divine without becoming truly human. The church needed a much stronger formulation of the nature of the union of the eternal Logos with the human in the person of Jesus Christ. Cyril, though, argued for a complete union of two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ (Kelly 1978:319) and his arguments against Nestorius were considered a sound interpretation of the doctrine of the two natures. However he leaned more toward the Alexandrian tradition or Word-flesh Christology (Mckim 1988:39). A still more balanced view of Christology was required for the church.

In the years from the Council of Ephesus in 431 to 448 AD, there were many attempts made to reconcile the Antiochene and Alexandrian understandings of Christology, but all without much success.

In the year 448 AD another crisis arose. Eutyches (378-458) disliked Cyril's understanding of the union of two natures in one person. Eutyches held that after the union of two natures, Jesus was left with only one nature.³ He contended that

the divinity of Christ completely absorbed the humanity of Christ, leaving Jesus only one nature (Kelly 1978:330-34).

Up until the Chalcedonian Council, the church faced different christological controversies from varied groups each attempting to resolve the problem of the two natures of Jesus Christ, and each producing a dichotomized christology, either emphasizing the humanity or the divinity of Christ. Against such dichotomized views of Christ's nature, the early church, however, persistently insisted upon a dialectical tension between the two natures of Christ, a dialectical christology which affirmed both the humanity and the divinity of Christ at the same time. The councils' affirmation was the both-and response the early church had maintained all along. Still, no definitive formulation was made.

Leo I (died 461), the pope of the Roman church, preceding the Chalcedonian council, wrote a document to the emperor condemning the one-sided christology of Eutyches. This document came to be known as Leo's Tome which set the basic foundation for a dialectical or both-and Christology which was later affirmed in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Leo I held that the divine and human coexist in Jesus Christ and are not mixed or confused. Although the natures act separately, they always act in relation with each other (Kelly 1978:337ff). In other words, the two natures in one person are independently dependent. Each nature maintains its own properties without ceasing to communicate with other properties. That is why each nature, divine and human, conducts its own activities in communion with the other. "The Word does what

belongs to it, and the flesh carries out what belongs to it" (1978:337ff). There is no supremacy of divine or human over each other or dissolving of the two into one. Rather a healthy tension is retained between the two natures. This is what is reflected in the Chalcedonian definition.

The Council of Chalcedon was convened by the Emperor Marcian (396-457) at Chalcedon in 451 AD, with more than five hundred participating bishops, to deal with Christological problems. The goal of the council was to produce a Christological formula which would affirm the belief in one Christ who is "truly God and truly human," "perfect in Godhead, perfect in manhood" (Kelly:338-43). In formulating a Christological definition, the Council of Chalcedon accepted the Christological affirmations of the Nicene Creed of 325 AD and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 AD, and also the two letters of Cyril and Leo's Tome. These documents represented in one way or another a christology which adequately represented the two natures of Christ. The Chalcedonian Council affirmed this definition:

Following, therefore, the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all agree in teaching that this very same Son is complete in his deity and complete--the very same--in his humanity, truly God and truly human being, this very same one being composed of a rational soul and a body, coessential [*homoousios*] with the Father as to his deity and coessential [*homoousios*] with us--the very same one--as to his humanity, being like us in every respect apart from sin. As to his deity, he was born from the Father before the ages, but as to his humanity, the very same one was born in the last days from the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God [*Theotokos*], for our sake and the sake of our salvation: one and the same Christ, Son, Only Begotten, acknowledged to be unconfusedly, unalterably, undividedly, inseparably in two natures, since the difference of the natures is not destroyed because of the union, but on the contrary, the character of each nature is preserved

and comes together in one person [*prosopon*] and one hypostasis, not divided or torn into two persons [*prosopa*] but one and the same Son and only begotten God, Logos, Lord Jesus Christ—just as in earlier times the prophets and also the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us about him, and the symbol of our Fathers transmitted to us. (cited in Norris 1980:159)

The Chalcedonian definition, down through the centuries, has become normative in the church for understanding the person of Jesus Christ, mainly because it represents a balanced view of Christology. It does not destroy the difference of the natures because of the union, but, rather, preserves the character of each nature.

The Chalcedonian formula picked up concerns of both the Alexandrians and the Antiochenes and gave equal recognition to both the unity and the duality in Jesus Christ. In spite of his two natures, Christ remains one person and is not torn into two persons. Two natures are united in Christ, but each nature is complete and retains its distinctive character and operation. “Chalcedon affirmed both the distinction and the completeness of Jesus Christ as being God and a human being at the same time” (McKim 1988:43). This dialectical approach to Christology provided an answer even after the Chalcedonian Council when the controversy arose in the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD regarding whether Christ had one will or two. The Third Council of Constantinople in 680-81 AD settled the *monothelite* (one-will) controversy by affirming, “In our Lord, Jesus Christ, there are two natural wills, and two natural operations, indivisibly, inconvertibly, inseparably, without any fusion, as the holy fathers have taught, and that these two natural wills are not contrary, as wicked heretics have said” (Hughes

1961:117). This definition clearly indicates that the council again required the Chalcedonian balance to express the full reality of the incarnate Christ.

The Chalcedonian formula makes it crystal clear that a both-and dialectical stance has characterized the church's response to the Christological controversy as it arose again and again in the early church. The history of the Christian church shows again and again that whenever one side was stressed to the exclusion of the other, the church sought to restore the Chalcedonian balance.

Just as the church in the Patristic period insisted upon a christology adequately representing both the divine and the human natures of Jesus, so the church in the Enlightenment period faced a theological controversy in which a dichotomy was created between the transcendence and the immanence of God by stressing one and excluding the other.

Theological Tension: Transcendence or Immanence: Enlightenment Period

The church in every era has been confronted with the challenge of articulating the Christian understanding of the nature of God in a manner that holds in dialectical tension the twin truths of the divine transcendence and the divine immanence. Where such balance is lacking, serious theological problems readily emerge.

The genesis of the Enlightenment brought an era in which human beings and human achievements were given an elevated position. In contrast to medieval and Reformation thinking, which viewed God as the center of human history, the Enlightenment theologians tended to "think that God mattered because he could

be fit into the story of *their* lives" (Placher 1983:237-38). God was moved from a lofty position and was brought down to human affairs. God's revelation was replaced by human reason. Anselm's dictum, "I believe in order that I may understand" was changed to "I believe what I can understand" (Grenz and Olson 1992:17). Such thinking created a dichotomy between revelation and reason. The Enlightenment believed that human reason was the ultimate tool to discover what the truth was, and only the measurable aspects of the universe were considered real and true. Mathematical knowledge was esteemed more highly than metaphysical knowledge. Rene Descartes (1596-1650), a French thinker, with his mathematical model, introduced reasoning and not divine revelation as the starting point for philosophy and theology. This move from revelation to reason "placed theology in a difficult predicament" (1992:19). An alternate means of proving theological truth emerged. While Positivism, or deduction, was devalued; Rationalism, or induction, was elevated. Theologians were faced with the dilemma of whether to build their theology on the primacy of reason⁴ or to deny that reason by itself was a valid instrument for knowledge of eternal realities (Gonzalez 1975:297). Grenz and Olson⁵ thus conclude that "The emphasis on the voice of reason within, rather than the voice of God from above, set the stage for the orientation to the immanence characteristic of modern theology since Descartes" (1992:19).

The elevation of the religion of reason in Enlightenment opened the way for human autonomy. The individuals now began to question the external authority

and the teachings of Christian dogma formulated in the patristic and medieval periods. Enlightenment thinkers attempted to bind God so closely to human reason and autonomy that “God’s transcendence came to be dissolved in the immanence of the divine within the orderly realm of creation and reason” (Grenz and Olson 1992:23). God as immanent became more and more significant over against the transcendent reality of God. The triumph of immanence in the Enlightenment continued through the nineteenth century until the focus was shifted to the transcendence of God in neo-orthodoxy at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The emphasis on the immanence of God continued in the theology of the nineteenth century shaped by the three thinkers: Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Each of these thinkers proposed a different dimension of religion, “the moral (Kant), the intellectual (Hegel), and the intuitive (Schleiermacher)” (Grenz and Olson 1992:25), yet the immanent God of the Enlightenment lay at the foundation of their theology.

The eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that the ethical dimension of life is the essence of religion. Since for Kant, the moral dimension is the central concern of religion, the knowledge of the nature of God beyond the moral or ethical dimension is not possible (Kant 1960:130ff). Kant’s elevation of human morality is closer to the ethos of Enlightenment. His approach is different however because his morally oriented theology is not abstract as it was in the case of Enlightenment. He did not speak of human reason in an abstract sense, but in its relation to the moral dimension of life. He placed human

reason in relationship to the moral dimension of human existence. However, in contrast to the classical theologians whose point of departure was the revelation of God, Kant constructed his theology on the basis of the human person as a being of reason. Thus, his theology moved from reason to revelation, and not from revelation to reason (Grenz and Olson 1992:30). Contrary to classical Christian understanding, Kant grounded his theology in human morality (1992:31). For example, he reversed the order of grace and works central to the Reformation. He emphasized that “true religion is to consist not in the knowing or considering of what God does or has done for our salvation but in what we must do to become worthy of it” (1960:123). Our duty is simply to live morally (1960:158). Thus, the right order for human beings is “not to go from grace to virtue, but rather to progress from virtue to pardoning grace” (1960:190).

In keeping with the Enlightenment, Kant’s morally oriented theology remained purely anthropocentric. He attempted to establish a new relation between transcendence and immanence by shifting the focus of religion from the domain of pure reason⁶ to his method of practical reason.⁷ He however could not overcome the dichotomized view of God postulated by the Enlightenment thinkers. His work led “inescapably to an emphasis on the divine immanence” (Grenz and Olson 1992:31) without placing an equal emphasis on the divine transcendence. In Kant’s theology, “the transcendent God is easily lost in the voice of the categorical imperative found in the depths of human ‘practical reason’” (1992:31).

Another great German philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) also sought

to offer an alternative to the Enlightenment. Whereas Kant attempted to show the transcendent in the moral dimension of human life, Hegel “looked to the intellectual dimension for that sense of transcendence” (1992:32).

The Enlightenment reshaped theology into the image of natural science, hoping thereby to find truth and God in the realm of nature. Nature was viewed as a finished product. Hegel broke with this line of thought and placed philosophy above the sciences. He taught that reality is active and developing. It is not static, but dynamic. Enlightenment thinkers believed that reality is logical, but Hegel asserted that not only is reality logical, logic is in a sense reality, for what is rational is actual (1954:224). Grenz and Olson put it well when they say that Hegel “viewed philosophy as a means not only toward the discovery of but also toward the coming into being of ultimate truth” (1992:33). In making the intellect the essence of religion, Hegel “hoped to find God not in nature as its aloof Designer but in ‘the Idea,’ in the meaning that lies behind the process of the human story as a whole” (1992:33).

Hegel viewed truth as process, and not static or consisting of rational conclusions. Truth is the whole, ongoing historical process. It is not an isolated fact, but history (Hegel 1967:807-808). Hegel, therefore, “replaced the traditional notion of static being with the dynamic concept of process” (1992:34). Truth emerges in the ongoing activity of the process, but even that truth is always becoming, seeking new and fuller truth. This process of becoming is governed by a law of dialectic. The Hegelian dialectic is generally described as the triad of

thesis-antithesis-synthesis (Gonzalez 1975:315). This dialectic does not hold the two poles in tension. Rather the two are merged in their synthesis. "First a thesis arises. This immediately generates its antithesis. The two are then merged in their synthesis. The synthesis constitutes a new thesis, and the process continues" (Grenz and Olson 1992:35). The Hegelian dialectic is "the affirmation that reality--and reason with it--is dynamic" (Gonzalez 1975:316). Since reality is dynamic, according to Hegel, all of history reveals the unfolding of the Spirit through the dialectic process (Gonzalez 1975:315-18). Gonzalez states, "Hegel did not see history as revealing a hidden truth behind or beyond it. On the contrary, history itself was truth--dynamic truth, dialectical truth" (1975:316).

The Spirit, truth as process, and the dialectic lay at the foundation of Hegel's view of the relationship among philosophy, theology and history (1992:35-36). The Spirit is active in the field of history. The significance of theology is the link between God and Spirit. The Absolute Spirit is God who reveals Godself in the process of history. This connection implies that the knowledge of God is obtainable through philosophical understanding, and "in the final analysis philosophy is the history of thought, because history reveals the gradual unfolding of truth, so also in the end religion and theology are related to philosophy, for God can be conceived as existing only in the sense of his historical unfolding" (Grenz and Olson 1992:36).

Hegel was concerned about the dilemma that the Enlightenment had created, the dilemma between traditional orthodoxy and radical skepticism. He

sought to resolve this dilemma by attempting to establish a relationship between Christianity and philosophy. In doing so, Christianity was transformed into philosophy, “the transcendent God of the prophets, apostles and church fathers became the immanent *Weltgeist*, the Absolute Spirit that actualizes itself in human history” (1992:38). In his attempt to overcome the Enlightenment’s lopsided view of God, Hegel’s work remained the “work of a radical immanentist.”⁸

For Hegel, God and world were ultimately inseparable. He provided a vision of the God-world unity. Hegel said, “We define God when we say, that He distinguishes Himself from Himself, and is an object for Himself, but that in this distinction He is purely identical with Himself, is in fact Spirit” (cited in Placher 1983:276). He asserted, “Without the world God is not God” (cited in Grenz and Olson 1992:38). By this he meant that God is not a self-sufficient being in and for Godself. God needs the world for God’s own self actualization. World history is also God’s history (1992:38).

Hegel’s view of the relationship between God and the world focused so much on God’s immanence that it almost lost the transcendent nature of God. That is why it created, as Grenz & Olson observe, “the pattern for many later varieties of a theological alternative commonly called ‘panentheism’ “ (1992:38).⁹

The third major thinker of the nineteenth century was also a German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who also sought to move beyond the Enlightenment and attempted to establish a new relation of transcendence and immanence. He, however, did not look to Kant’s morality or

Hegel's intellect as the focal point of the religious dimension. He looked to "feeling," a special human experience, as the foundation of theology.

Prior to the Enlightenment, orthodoxy viewed theology "from above," and thus reflected on supernaturally revealed truths. Enlightenment reacted to it and viewed theology "from below," and thus constructed theology by reflecting on rational thought about God. Schleiermacher contested that orthodox theology stifled human creativity whereas Enlightenment made theology purely rational. He proposed to "reroute theology entirely by considering it as *human* reflection on human experience of God" (Grenz and Olson 1992:44). For Schleiermacher, not a revealed set of propositions, but human religious experience became the true source of theological reflection and construction. He sought to reconstruct theology on the basis of human experience so as not to elevate God at the expense of humanity, but to bring the two together in an intrinsic way (1992:43).

Schleiermacher, in his classic book The Christian Faith, first published in 1820 -1821 and a revised edition in 1830 (trans. 1928), argued: "[Theology] is based entirely on the inner experience of the believers; its only purpose is to describe and elucidate that experience" (1928:428). He believed that such religious feeling¹⁰ lies within every individual and is thus fundamental and universal in human experience.

Because Schleiermacher kept his theology within the bounds of human religious experience, the Bible and the church, while important, were not central for Christian doctrines. He asserted that all doctrines "must be extracted from the

Christian religious self-consciousness, i.e. the inward experience of Christian people" (1928:265). The doctrine of God is thus determined by human religious experience. For Schleiermacher, the attributes that God is described with are not God's attributes per se; they are actually human depictions of God. He says, "All attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something special in God, but only something special in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related in Him" (1928:194). This means that one can talk about God only in terms of human experience of God. God exists and moves in relation to human religious experience. Apart from that, God is unknowable. God loses God's transcendent nature in being reduced to a mode of human experience. One of Schleiermacher's greatest critiques, Karl Barth, a German theologian, criticized him for trying to speak about God by speaking about humankind in a very loud voice. Barth criticized Schleiermacher for making theology radically anthropocentric and setting the course at the end of which certain theologians of the mid-twentieth century proclaimed God to be dead (1982:186ff). In an evaluation of Schleiermacher's theology, Grenz and Olson state that "Schleiermacher's doctrine of God suffers from an overemphasis on immanence. God's activity becomes virtually identical with nature to the extent that evil and suffering are as much God's activity as is redemption (1992:50). Schleiermacher also tends to think that God has no existence above and apart from the world (1928:156). That is precisely why Grenz and Olson describe Schleiermacher's doctrine of God as panentheistic (1992:50).

Schleiermacher attempted to secure a place for religion by showing that its focal point resides neither in morality nor in knowledge, but in feeling. Although, Schleiermacher moved beyond the Age of Reason, his thinking centered around human experience. Consequently, he sought to build his theology “from below.” He restricted it within the bounds of piety alone.

The liberal theology of the nineteenth century which overemphasized the immanence of God was challenged in the twentieth century by the neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth who attempted to replace the immanence with the transcendence of God.

Karl Barth (1886-1968) saw no future for the liberal theology of the nineteenth century. In his commentary on The Epistle to the Romans (1933), first published in 1919, Barth criticized liberal theology for turning the Scriptures into a human religion and failing to recognize them as the Word of God. Human beings in themselves are incapable of comprehending because it comes from a God utterly distinct from them (1933:28). Barth set a new pace in theology. He reversed the order in theological method. He replaced the nineteenth century’s human-centered theology “from below” with God-centered theology “from above.” He emphasized the wholly otherness of God, and built his theology not on morality, reason or human experience, but on God’s revelation.

Barth opposed natural theology which attempted to gain knowledge of God from nature, culture and philosophy. The basis or the focal point of Barth’s theology was God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. That is why he argued in

Anselm: Fides Quarens Intellectum (faith seeking understanding) (1960) that all theology is to be done in the context of prayer and obedience (:34). In essence, Barth asserted that the presupposition of right theology is a life of faith, and the basis of true theology must be God's Word, the Bible (1960:40). He declared, "The possibility of knowledge of God's Word lies in God's Word and nowhere else" (1975:222).

While emphasizing God's love, Barth attempted to protect the freedom of this love. He affirmed that God loves the world, but God would still be God even if God did not choose to love the world (1957:280). In contrast to the liberal theology of the nineteenth century, Barth stressed God's absolute transcendence over the world, which apparently he thought of in terms of God's freedom. He said, "The loftiness, the sovereign majesty, the holiness, the glory--even what is termed the transcendence of God--what is it but this self-determination, this freedom, of the divine living and loving, the divine person?" (1957:302)

This idea of God's otherness and freedom led Barth to affirm that from eternity God decided to acquit humanity at great cost to himself (1978:167). By this he meant that people may try to live a godless life in rejection of God, but "their desire and undertaking were nullified by God before the world began. . . . What is laid up for man is eternal life in fellowship with God" (1978:319). Does this mean that Barth advocated universalism? He gave an answer to this question: "I do not teach it, but also do not not teach it" (cited in Jüngel 1968:44-45).¹¹

Barth's theological method relies totally on God's revelation. He reacted

vehemently against the Enlightenment's one-sided emphasis on the immanence of God, and thus recovered the transcendence of God. In his pursuit to recover the transcendence of God, Barth took up theological autonomy and refused to consider any other disciplines. Grenz and Olson summarized this problem:

If there are no intelligible bridges connecting theology with other disciplines or with common human experience, how can Christian belief appear to outsiders as anything but esoteric? It is one thing for Barth to reject liberal theology's reduction of Christian belief to what can be anticipated within the horizon of human experience; it is another thing for him to eliminate any connection between belief and experience. (1992:75)

In his attempt to protect God's freedom and transcendence, Barth went to the other extreme. His theology "sacrificed too much on the human side of the God-world relationship" (Grenz and Olson 1992:77). This is clearly seen in his doctrine of salvation. G.C. Berkouwer, one of Barth's sympathetic critics concluded, "In Barth's theology the triumph of grace makes vague the seriousness of the human decision, just as the kerygma is threatened with becoming a mere announcement without any vital exhortation" (1956:279).

Enlightenment theology emphasized the immanence at the exclusion of the transcendence of God. Barth, On the other hand, emphasized the transcendence at the exclusion of the immanence of God. Barth criticized Schleiermacher for trying to talk about God by talking about humankind in a very loud voice. We can say that Barth was trying to talk about humanity by talking about God in a very loud voice.

The discussion on this section centered first on the Enlightenment, which

elevated reason over revelation. It then showed the emphasis on immanence in nineteenth century theology and on transcendence in Neo-orthodoxy.

In the wake of this lopsided emphasis theologians in the twentieth century have realized the need for constructing a theology that sufficiently balances and holds in dialectical tension the immanence and the transcendence of God. Grenz and Olson, in 20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age (1992), focus on the themes of transcendence and immanence. The authors lay some important groundwork to show a conscious effort on the part of evangelical thinkers to move in the direction of affirming the balance. Grenz and Olson present Carl F.H. Henry (born 1913-) and Bernard Ramm (born 1916-) as representatives of evangelical theology which in the second half of the twentieth century initiated a move from an imbalanced mode of theology to a more balanced mode of theology.

Carl Henry, in his book The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism (1947), criticized fundamentalists for withdrawing from their responsibility of dealing with the issues of the world; divorcing Christian faith from social and intellectual reform; moving away from preaching the Kingdom of God as a present reality, and thus failing to impact the mindset of society (1947:16). Seeing the “fundamentalists” who wanted to preserve the fundamentals of the Christian faith at the expense of its relevance, Henry said, “The problem is not that biblical theology is outdated, it is rather that some of its expositors seem out of touch with the frontiers of doubt in our day” (1964:140-41).

Grenz and Olson say that Henry agreed with the modern emphasis on the

functional, dynamic and teleological dimensions of revelation, but argued that these cannot be separated from the propositional (1992:292). In other words, Henry argued that revelation is propositional because it is rational. Consequently, Christianity cannot escape from rationality; it is oriented toward the intellect (1992:293).

Henry's concern for propositional revelation led him naturally to talk about the transcendent God, who not only speaks to human creatures but also acts in the world. He claimed that the lopsided emphasis on the immanence of God was only a partial representation of the whole nature of God. The transcendence of God was equally important, because, according to him, it meant that "nature is always and everywhere open to his purpose, a purpose that he expresses freely either in repetitive cosmic processes and events, or in once-for-all acts" (1983:50).

Bernard Ramm, a contemporary of Carl Henry, also engaged in formulating theology which took the Enlightenment seriously and at the same time affirmed classical Christianity. He pointed out that "Fundamentalism attempts to shield itself from the Enlightenment. . . . On the other hand, the evangelical believes that the Enlightenment cannot be undone" (1973:70). Ramm moved beyond fundamentalism to see a more positive contribution of the Enlightenment. Thus according to Grenz and Olson, Ramm believed that the "divine revelation was not in competition with the best of modern learning, but on the contrary that the two coalesced. In this way, the transcendent One was also immanent--present as the truth of all human knowledge" (1992:309).

It is unclear whether Henry and Ramm achieved a reconstitution of the balance between the transcendence and the immanence of God. It is clear however that they criticized liberal theology for making the immanent aspect prominent at the exclusion of the transcendent, and fundamental theology for making the transcendent aspect prominent to the exclusion of the immanent. Both of them thus set a tone for a trend to move beyond the mode of imbalance to affirm a more balanced view of God.

Grenz and Olson, in the concluding chapter of their book, appeal for an evangelical theology which must affirm the twin truths of the divine transcendence and immanence without creating any dichotomy between the two (1992:310-15). They believe that an overemphasis on transcendence can lead to a theology that is irrelevant to the cultural context in which it seeks to speak, whereas an overemphasis on immanence can produce a theology held captive to a specific culture (1992:12). They summarize:

The God who addresses us from beyond--from the then-and-there--is the God who is with us in the present--in the here-and-now. Our realization of this truth lies at the heart of the theological balancing of the divine immanence with the divine transcendence. (1992:315)

A very recent project for responding to Grenz and Olson's appeal is Clark Pinnock's openness of God theology. Clark Pinnock, a leading evangelical theologian, and his co-authors in a new book entitled The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God (1994), advocate an open view of God. This book deals with the transcendence and immanence of God from biblical, historical, systematic, philosophical, and practical perspectives.

These authors set forth a biblically based, rational argument that the God of the Bible is above us and with us in time. They argue that Christian theology has been falsely polarized. Though God is both transcendent and immanent, for centuries, theology has tended to be lopsided. Pinnock thus summarizes:

It is important to recognize that God (according to the Bible) is both transcendent (that is, self-sufficient, the Creator of the world, ontologically other than creation, sovereign and eternal) and at the same time immanent (that is, present to the world, active within history, involved, relational and temporal). (1994:105)

The genesis of Enlightenment, though, created an imbalance in theological thinking, evangelical theology in the later part of the twentieth century began to move in the direction of a both-and theological thinking. This new direction in evangelical theology has also affected positively the mission of the church.

Ecclesiological Tension: Proclamation or Social Action: Modern Period

The mission of the church until the Modern Era, in attempting to solve the problem of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility, has been to distinguish between two mandates, the one spiritual, the other social. On the one hand are those who say the church's only mission is to proclaim the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ; on the other hand are those who advocate that Christians participate solely in social welfare to bring justice and order in human society.

John R.W. Stott, a spokesperson of evangelicalism, expresses his concern:

It is exceedingly strange that any followers of Jesus Christ should ever have needed to ask whether social involvement was their concern, and that controversy should have blown up over the relationship between evangelism from social responsibility. (1990:2)

Perhaps this distinction between evangelism and social concern was not very common prior to the period of Enlightenment. J. Wesley Bready, in his book, England Before and After Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform (1939), states that the Evangelical Revival “did more to transfigure the moral character of the general populace, than any other movement British history can record” (1939:327). Similarly, David O. Moberg, a Christian sociologist, says, “Social history in England and the United States clearly reveals that evangelical Christianity played a major role in both social reconstruction and social welfare” (1972:28). Speaking about John Wesley, John Stott comments that the gospel Wesley preached “inspired people to take up social causes in the name of Christ” (1990:2). For, “Wesley was both a preacher of the gospel and a prophet of social righteousness” (1990:3). The Evangelical Awakenings in the eighteenth century kept the two mandates, commitment to social reform and enthusiasm for revival inseparable (Bosch 1991:403). The Grand Rapids Report stated that “evangelism and social concern have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the church. . . .Christian people have often engaged in both activities quite unselfconsciously, without feeling any need to define what they were doing or why” (1982:19).

However, during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, a major shift toward the primacy of the “evangelistic mandate” (Bosch 1991:403) occurred, a shift which American historian Timothy L. Smith has termed “the Great Reversal” (cited in Moberg 1972:30). John Stott extracts five reasons from Moberg’s analysis

of this “Great Reversal” in the position of evangelicals on social responsibility (1990:6-9).¹² David Bosch observed that the rise of premillennialism which later became known as fundamentalism with its protest against the “this-worldliness of the Social Gospel” was one of the main reasons for the diminished interest in social concern among the evangelical Christians (1991: 405).

During this period (1909-1915) The Fundamentals, a twelve volume series, was published, from which the term “fundamentalism” became commonly known (Moberg 1972:31; Stott 1990:6). This set the tone for the “fundamentalist-modernist controversies” (Moberg 1972:15). Moberg says, “The so-called ‘ecumenical wing’ of Protestant Christianity tends to emphasize social involvement, while ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘evangelicals’ stress evangelism” (1972:14). The fundamentalists, in seeking to defend the fundamentals of the faith, reacted vehemently against the so-called “social gospel” advocated by Walter Rauschenbusch, a Professor of Church History at Rochester Seminary in New York. In his book, Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907), Rauschenbusch criticized capitalism and advocated a kind of Christian socialism (1907:394-405; Stott 1990:6-7). He contrasted “the old evangel of the saved soul” with “the new evangel of the Kingdom of God” (1907:357). He explained that “It is not a matter of getting individuals into heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven” (1907:65). He argued that the main purpose of Christianity is to transform human society into the Kingdom of God (1907:xiii). Thus he identified the Kingdom of God with a reconstruction of society on the basis of Christian

principles (1907:149). Since the Kingdom of God is a reconstruction of society, he believed that “human beings can establish the divine Kingdom by themselves” (1907:210; Stott 1990:7).

The social gospel theology in the modernist camp stressed social concern in an exclusivistic way that paid no proper attention to evangelism. Fundamental Christians saw no room for evangelism in the social gospel theology. They became preoccupied with the defense of their faith and the proclamation of the gospel, and thus the pendulum swung to the other side. Rev. Norman W. Berg, president of the Lutheran Free Conference, illustrated this swing by stating that “the mission of the church is the salvation of souls, not the redemption of society” (cited in Moberg 1972:18).

Moberg explains that the agenda of the fundamental Christians was geared toward personal evangelism and mass revivalism. They believed that the essential purpose of the church was winning souls for Christ (1972:20). Winning souls will hasten the coming of the Lord (1972:21). Soul-winning will solve the social problems (:21). Winning souls for Christ will fetch stars in one’s heavenly crown (1972:20).

There were those who believed that the present world was beyond “improvement or redemption” (Stott 1990:8). The world will get better only when Jesus returns. There is no sense trying to reform or improve the society.¹³ This heavenly-bound evangelism reversed the order and thus moved away from a balanced position that once gave proper attention to both evangelism and social

responsibility.

However, in the main body of evangelicalism, a change began to happen. Moberg calls it “Reversing the Great Reversal” (1972:150). Catalytic in this move was Carl Henry, says David Bosch (1991:404). Carl Henry protested the lack of social program in fundamental theology. He stated that fundamentalism has ignored its social responsibility for humankind and thus has created a gap between the Christian faith and social concern (1947:16).¹⁴ Henry thus concluded, “There is not room. . . for a gospel that is indifferent to the needs of the total man nor of the global man” (quoted in Bosch 1991:404).

The concern for a balanced view of evangelism gradually began to filter through. The turning point came when the International Congress on World Evangelization met in July 1974 at Lausanne, Switzerland. The outcome of it was the Lausanne Covenant. It confessed making “evangelism and social concern . . . mutually exclusive” and affirmed that “evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty” (Stott 1975b:25).

John Stott, who had interpreted the Great Commission exclusively in terms of evangelism at the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin 1966 (1975a:23), published a book soon after the Lausanne Conference stating his view on evangelism in a more balance way. He said:

I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus. (1975a:23)¹⁵

Stott mentions that, in the years following the Lausanne Conference,

there was a tension within the evangelical movement, “as some emphasized evangelism, others social activity” (1990:10). In June 1982, a “Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility” (CRESR), sponsored by the Lausanne Committee and the World Evangelical Fellowship, was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The report stated the primacy of evangelism, but explained that “its priority may not always be *chronologically* prior to social engagement” (1982:25; Bosch 1991:406).

After years of rigorous attempts made by the evangelicals, eventually a balanced position between evangelism and social concern emerged at a World Evangelical Fellowship consultation in Wheaton in 1983. One track of the consultation was devoted to “The Church in Response to Human Need.”¹⁶ Speaking about this consultation, Bosch observed that for the first time an international evangelical conference overcame “the perennial dichotomy” (1991:407). Without giving priority to either evangelism or social action, in the final document the Wheaton '83 Statement, paragraph 26, stated,

Evil is not only in the human heart but also in social structures. . . . The mission of the church includes both the proclamation of the Gospel and its demonstration. We must therefore evangelize, respond to immediate human needs, and press for social transformation. (Samuel 1987:260)

The Great Reversal was reversed and revised. The evangelicals, through their conscious and continued efforts, overcame the proclamation-social action dichotomy. A both-and approach gave proper attention to both proclamation and social action. Both evangelism and social responsibility were seen dialectically

related to each other. Both facets of the gospel were held in dialectical tension.

All three problems, Christological, theological, and ecclesiological, appeared in different periods of history. And the church resorted again and again to the dialectical relational paradigm in responding to challenges from its cultural and religious context. The post modern period is faced with a similar problem but of a different nature. It is a missiological problem. A problem that exists between Christianity and world religions, between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions.

Missiological Tension: Particularity or Plurality: Post-modern Period

This section will highlight how some of the leading theologians and missiologists are beginning to suggest a move in the both-and direction for responding to the missiological challenge in the post modern era.

David Tracy argues in his book Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope (1994 first published 1987) that truth will not be reached by one point of view trying to convince all the others that it alone is correct. Keeping the elements of Christian identity and religious plurality in dialectical tension is what is called for in the post-modern world.

David Bosch, in his book Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions (1991), especially in part three, "Toward a Relevant Missiology," develops a model which he calls a creative tension model. In discussing the interrelationship between dialogue and mission, Bosch critiques the three models (exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism). He argues that these

three models are inadequate because they attempt to resolve the tension in developing a Christian theology of religions. Although Bosch's creative tension paradigm correctly perceives a dialectical relation between the dialogical nature and the missionary nature of Christianity, it is not developed adequately to understand the dialectical relation between the two.

Stephen B. Bevans in Models of Contextual Theology (1992) identifies five models for doing contextual theology. The most important to this study is the *synthetic model*. The synthetic model is "both/and." It tries to preserve the importance of the gospel and the heritage of traditional doctrinal formulations, while at the same time acknowledging the vital role culture has played and can play in theology, even to the setting of the theological agenda. Bevans suggests that another name for this model might be the "dialectical model." This model is used by theologians such as Aylward Shorter, who speaks of interculturalism in Toward a Theology of Inculturation (1988) as the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian faith and a culture or cultures. Inculturation implies that the Christian message transforms a culture. It is also the case that Christianity is transformed by culture, not in a way that falsifies the message, but in the way in which the message is formulated and interpreted anew.

Jürgen Moltmann refers to a dialectical tension in terms of *identity and relevance* in his book The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions (1990). He argues that the essence of the Christian faith must seek, on the one hand, how to be relevant to the world and, on the other, how to

maintain its identity in Christ. These two are never unrelated; neither are they the same.

Clark Pinnock in Chapter six, "Spirit & Universality" in Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit (1996) shows a tension between the belief that God loves the whole world (universality) and the belief that Jesus is the only way to God (particularity). It is the question of how both can be true. It is primarily a challenge to theological interpretation, to explain how it proposes to correlate universality and particularity. Pinnock argues in this chapter that if the twin truths of universality and particularity are seen in the light of the interdependent missions of Son and Spirit, then the two poles turn out to be both-and, not either-or.

Lakshman Wickremesinghe in an article titled "Living in Christ with People" CTC Bulletin (1984, 17-34) presents a theological reflection on living in Christ from his theological and contextual perspective. He believes that a genuine reflection arises from "encountering God in the context of contemporary life and history." His argument is that our inner perception is shaped by our cultural, religious, and experiential environment. Thus he argues that the challenge for Asian Christians is to maintain a dialectical tension between being Asian culturally and Christian religiously. Is it possible to live with a dual identity? A correct understanding of a theology of religions is crucial for a possible answer to this important question.

Summary

In this chapter we have looked at four crucial responses of the Christian church to cultural challenges. In each case the issue was finally formulated as some kind of both-and dialectical tension. The Chalcedonian definition shows that the early church in responding to christological problems moved progressively in the direction of a both-and dialectical christology. The church discovered the only way to preserve the divine and the human natures of Jesus Christ was to hold them in dialectical tension. They affirmed that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Enlightenment rationalism and humanism attracted theologians to theologizing from the human reality, leading the three theologians we looked at to over emphasize the immanence of God. In reaction, neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth laid inordinate stress on God's transcendence. Evangelical theology, representing classical and Reformation theology, sought to bring the church back to the balance of a both-and theism holding divine immanence and divine transcendence in dynamic tension--a both-and theism. In the modern period when theologians stressed either evangelism or social action, evangelical theology worked toward holding both proclamation and social action together.

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate that, as a matter of historical reality, the church has, again and again in response to crucial cultural and theological challenges, settled on a both-and solution--a kind of Chalcedonian dialectic. We suggest that a theological methodology exists within

church history that may be employed to deal with the present missiological controversy. Applied in this context, a new method of doing theology can be constructed for developing a Christian theology of religions.

We now explore representative proposals for a theology of religion, evaluating each in relation to this historical reality. Finally proposing a resolution of the tendency to emphasize either the plurality of religions or the particularity of Christ by affirming them both in balanced dynamic tension--a both-and theology of religions.

¹ This was a sect of Jewish Christians which flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era.

² Serapion, Bishop of Antioch (190-203), is the first to use the name "Docetists."

³ This view is also known as monophysism and Eutyches is regarded as the founder of monophysitism.

⁴ The Enlightenment thinkers placed importance on reason for building theology.

⁵ They are evangelical theologians who authored the book *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (1992).

⁶ The concept of pure reason belonging to the Enlightenment meant the real or sense-based knowledge. See Grenz and Olson (1992:31-32).

⁷ This means the realm of knowledge based on the experience of the human person as a morally conditioned being. See Grenz and Olson (1992:31-32).

⁸ This is the conclusion of many Hegel critics, including George Lichtheim, Introduction, in Hegel (1967:xxiii).

⁹ Panentheism is the belief that the being of God includes and penetrates the whole of universe, so that every part of it exists in God, but that God's being is more than, and is not exhausted by, the universe.

¹⁰ Religious feeling, which he often called "piety," is the consciousness of absolute dependence, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God (1928:12ff.).

¹¹ For Barth's explanation on universalism see (Barth 1978:417-18; 1960:61-62).

¹² These five reasons are: (1) the fight against theological liberalism (2) evangelicals reacted against the so-called "social gospel" advocated by Walter Rauschenbusch (3) the widespread pessimism which followed World War I (4) the spread of (through J.N. Darby' teaching) the premillennial scheme, and (5) the spread of Christianity among the middle-class people. See also Moberg (1972:30-43).

¹³ This was a premillennial teaching popularized by J.N. Darby. See Stott (1990:8ff.).

¹⁴ For his later reflection on this issue, see Carl F.H. Henry (1957).

¹⁵ Stott was one of the framers of the Lausanne Covenant.

¹⁶ The book *The Church in Response to Human Need* (1987), edited by Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden, contains all the papers presented at the consultation as well as the *Wheaton '83 Statement*.

CHAPTER 3

Religious Pluralism: A Global Reality

In line with Chapter one, this section will further describe a global reality of religious pluralism. After that I will seek to show that with a growing awareness of religious pluralism, a number of Christian theologians, primarily John Hick and Paul Knitter, are contending for a pluralistic theology of religions. In their pluralistic theology of religions three important Christian doctrines, namely revelation, christology, and soteriology, have undergone a radical revision, and I will attempt to describe them before I conclude the section with a brief evaluation.

A Global Reality of Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism has always existed, and there has been a plurality of religions in the world. Christians have had to bear witness to them, and in doing so reflect theologically on the validity of their claims. Until quite recently, however, the many religions, like the many cultures of which they are a component, existed for the most part in mutual isolation. Only with the revolutions of the recent past, especially the technological revolution in transportation and communication, also due to migrations, forced displacements, by wars, and geo-political changes after colonialism, has this isolation finally been penetrated. Many religions and cultures are now compelled to live with one another as next-door neighbors in a single global village. This enforced proximity

of each religion and culture to every other is a really new feature of religious plurality.

The practical reality that the world has become a "global village" brings people of other faiths and ideologies together. The study of history of religion and comparative religion has provided people opportunity to know and accumulate enormous amounts of knowledge of other faiths and beliefs. Translation of many of the world's religious books into the language of common use, English, has given people access to the knowledge of different religions. Today we inhabit a religiously plural world.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (The Christian Faith, 1963) made a clean break with the claims that Christianity is the only true religion. He initiated a new era in theology, the era characterized by the liberal Christian theology. He initiated a shift in doing theology "from above" to doing theology "from below." However, what seems to be new in the twentieth century, especially in this decade, is the growing number of Christians and theologians, such as John Hick, Paul Knitter, Raimundo Panikkar, and Stanley J. Samartha, who are proposing a pluralistic theology of religions. Thus the challenge posed to Christian witness and theology is significantly new.

With a growing awareness of religious pluralism, a number of Christian theologians are contending for a pluralistic theology of religions. John Hick and Paul Knitter, the primary contenders, are the subject of this chapter. The pluralist

stance taken by Hick and Knitter causes them to pose a central question for discussion: Is there only one way to the ultimate, or are there many? Challenging the claim of *one and only* in favor of *many and not one*, both Hick and Knitter suggest that all religions are authentic human responses to the one divine ultimate because the one divine ultimate is behind all the religions. There is commonality of revelation in all the religious traditions.

Revelational Commonness

German Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch, in his essay "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions," in Christianity and Other Religions (1980), and American philosopher William Hocking, in Rethinking Missions (1932), emphasized that Christianity can not be the sole container of salvation. Other religions also have equally salvific paths. Christianity can not claim that the sole revelation of God is in Christ. Hocking argued for a world faith and stressed that commonness in faith eventually brings all religions together while keeping their own identities.

These earlier pieces are important because they point to the fact that Hick's pluralistic theology has roots in the theological relativism seen in works by Troeltsch and Hocking.¹ Troeltsch laid the foundation for the pluralistic approach to religions by locating revelation universally within history generally and within human subjectivity in particular (1980:12-13). Both Hick and Knitter reflect Troeltsch's notion of universal divine revelation in their pluralistic theology of

religions. Knitter affirms, "Much of what we feel concerning religious pluralism is mirrored in Ernst Troeltsch" (1985:23).

The pluralistic theology of religion functions with a presupposition that every religion (particularly the major world religions) is the potential bearer of the knowledge of God. Two major proponents of the pluralistic theology of religions, John Hick and Paul Knitter, recognize the centrality of the nature of revelation to a theology of religions. However, they have not explicitly developed a doctrine of revelation. Largely due to their phenomenological approach, they choose not to make the doctrine of revelation a point of departure for constructing a theology of religions. Rather, in accordance with their approach, they reflect upon the nature and content of revelation only after they have considered the phenomena of the religions and of religious experience. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, they do shape their pluralistic theology of religion with a particular notion of revelation. Knitter offers a somewhat vague definition of revelation "as the reality in which God and man come in contact, in which God communicates the depth of his being and love and man freely opens himself to the force of this communication" (1974:9).²

John Hick is a main proponent of pluralism, a position maintaining that other religions also have salvific paths to one God. The Christian claim for "the only way" is rejected. This model has been developed during the past two decades quite creatively under the leadership of Hick, who aims for *theocentrism*. Paul Knitter says, "Hick is the most radical, the best known, and

therefore the most controversial of the proponents of a theocentric model for Christian approach to other religions" (1985:147). Hick identifies pluralism with theocentrism. He develops theocentrism, which is pluralistic, on an analogy of the "Copernican view." According to him the "Ptolemaic view" held the earth to be the center of the universe, so Christians have placed Christ or Christianity at the center of the world religions. Hick replaces this Ptolemaic perspective with the Copernican view. Just as Copernicus recognized the sun as the center of the earth, so God must be allowed to be the center of the world religions.³ This Copernican revolution brought a "shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the center to the realization that it is God who is at the center, and that all religions, . . . including our own, serve and revolve around him" (Hick 1977:131).⁴

Since God is at the center, and other religions, including Christianity, revolve around God, the logical conclusion then is that every religion is not only the bearer of God's knowledge, but also has revelational commonness. This suggests that every religion has revealed truths, and therefore, no one religion can claim to be essentially superior to the other. Furthermore, commonness does not mean the several truths are identical, but that no one religious tradition is revelationally privileged.

Hick states that "in the great majority of cases--say, 98 or 99 per cent--the religion in which a person believes and to which he adheres depends upon where he was born" (1980:172). What Hick means is that if a person is born to Hindu parents in India or to Christian parents in America, that person will most

likely be a Hindu or a Christian. Furthermore, he mentions that in various places of worship “the supreme being is referred to as God in a Christian church, as Adonai in a Jewish synagogue, as Allah in a Muslim mosque, as Param Atma in a Sikh gurdwara, as Rama or as Krishna in a Hindu temple” (1980:174).

Phenomenologically it is true then that the worshippers in different religions are worshipping one God, but through different concepts or mental images (1980:178). All religions revolve around God, but they reflect God in their own different ways. According to Hick, “the different world religions have each served as God’s means of revelation” (1980:182). D’Costa, in evaluating Hick’s theology, says that in Hick’s view the various religions are different revelations of God’s activity (1987:20). In other words, all religions have commonality of revelation. Differences in worship or referring to God by different names does not suggest a varying degree of revelation. Revelation is common to all religions given by one and the same God, but response to that revelation by each religion is culturally and historically conditioned (Hick 1973:106). This is what I mean by revelational commonness. Differences of the meaning of the revelation are only cultural or historical, not essential. That is why each religion approaches and reflects God differently. No one religion can claim to be superior to the other because “everywhere the one divine Spirit has been at work, pressing in upon the human work” (Hick 1980:183). Since there is commonality of revelation in major religious traditions, every religious expression is relative. That is to say, each religious expression is true in a sense that does not require other religious

expressions to be untrue. Religions might have grown up in isolation from each other, but the one Divine Reality is behind them all.⁵

The Eternal One is called by different names because each religious tradition is developed in a different cultural and historical context. Each religious tradition calls the Eternal One by different names because the Eternal One is behind every religious tradition regardless of its cultural or historical diversity. It is the commonality of revelation which brings all religious traditions onto common ground despite their cultural diversity. Thus Hick affirms revelational commonality amid the cultural diversity of all religious traditions.

Another important person in pluralistic theology, Roman Catholic theologian Paul Knitter, in many respects, has been influenced by Hick's theology. Knitter, like Hick, functions with the same presupposition that there is a commonality of revelation in all religions and religious experience. The possibility of truth in all religions makes dialogue possible. This possibility is grounded upon a presupposition that there is a common ground and goal for all religions. This means for Knitter that "there must be the same ultimate reality, the same divine presence . . . animating all religions and providing the ultimate ground and goal of dialogue" (1985:209). Knitter further explains it when he speaks about the Christian belief in universal divine revelation. He says,

On the basis of the Christian belief in a universal divine revelation within all religions, Christians not only can but should hypothesize about a common ground and goal for the history of religions Does not universal revelation form the basis for the possibility of a common source and direction for all faiths? (1985:209)

Knitter is more explicit and articulate than Hick in describing the nature of revelation and its implications for a pluralistic theology of religion.⁶ Knitter hypothesizes that the Christian belief in a universal divine revelation within all religions is warranted, presenting theological and dialogical arguments for the universal possibility of revelation in religions.⁷

The theological argument for the universal revelation in other religions rests, according to Knitter, in the Christian belief in the universal love and the salvific will of God. God's love is universal and God wills the salvation of all. He contends that "the realities of revelation and salvation cannot be confined to the Christian church or history" (1991:90). Since God desires the salvation of all, the universal divine revelation in other religious traditions is inevitable. Knitter's logic of argument is this that there is a universal salvation because there is a universal divine revelation. Desiring the salvation of all, God makes universal divine revelation possible within all religions. Salvation becomes possible through that revelation. The universality of salvation presupposes a universal divine revelation within all religions. In other words, salvation is common to all because all religious traditions share the commonality of divine revelation. That is why both Knitter and Hick contend that it is inconsistent, if not immoral, to assert the belief that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4) and yet restrict the possibility of that salvation to the context of Christianity (Knitter 1985:116). What kind of a God is this who offers a revelation that can never lead to salvation or to an authentic experience of the divine?

(1985:16)⁸ So, if God's universal salvific will is genuine and consistent, both Hick and Kintter will say, then a universal divine revelation is necessary. It is what Knitter calls a transcendental necessity.

According to Knitter, this universal divine revelation within all religions is based on a common source. The common source behind all religions is the Transcendent Reality (1985:210). This recognition of the common source behind all religions both affirms and relativizes one's own religion and religious experience, making dialogue with other religious traditions possible.

The second line of argument for a universal divine revelation is dialogical. Knitter argues the possibility of a universal divine revelation within all religions as a necessary presupposition for dialogue. One must presume the commonness of revelation in other religion before one can enter into a meaningful dialogue. A meaningful dialogue is impossible if this presupposition is missing. Knitter says,

Tillich was correct when he insisted that the first "presupposition" for interreligious dialogue must be "that both partners acknowledge the value of the other's religious conviction (as based ultimately on a revelatory experience)." (1985:114)

Given his dialogical stance on revelational commonness, Knitter insists that the purpose of dialogue can be neither to find points of contact in order to communicate the gospel better, nor to show how other religions can find fulfillment in Christianity.⁹ He says, "dialogue is the exchange of experience and understanding between two or more partners with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding" (1985:207). This statement presupposes and demonstrates that all partners, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or Muslim,

involved in dialogue have revelational commonness. They all have equal access to divine revelation. No one religion has a unique position in relation to divine revelation. All the partners can learn from and teach the other.¹⁰

Given the argument for dialogical presupposition, Knitter contends that “traditional explanations that either condemn other religions as pagan, or ignore them as irrelevant, or affirm them as stepping stones to the Gospel just do not fit the experience and awareness that many Christians have of other believers” (1985:85). Universal divine revelation is one of the “conditions for the very possibility of interreligious dialogue” (1985:207).

In this section I have demonstrated that both Hick and Knitter function with a revelational presupposition. Revelation is common in all religious traditions because there is one common source behind them. Every religious tradition is ignited by the One Transcendent Reality. Revelation is not only possible in religions other than Christian; it is a necessary presupposition. This presupposition of universal revelation or revelational commonness is evidenced by both God’s universal love and salvific will (theological) and the value of the other’s religious experience based on God’s revelation (dialogical). This commonness in revelation puts no religious tradition or religious figure in a privileged or unique position. It is in this line of argument that Hick and Knitter question the uniqueness or superiority of Christ. They contend for a relativized view of Christology.

Christological Relativity

Hick's Copernican revolution brings a paradigm shift and reopens the christological question. He admits that "this must be the most difficult of all issues for a Christian theology of religions" (1973:148). Through his Copernican model Hick moves away from a christocentric to a theocentric approach. This approach of Hick's does not abandon Christ. It rather allows Christians to continue to adhere to Christ as their unique savior without having to insist that he is necessarily unique or normative for others (Knitter 1985:149). Christ is unique for Christians but not for others. This means Hick abandons the normativity of Christ for the relativity of Christ. This approach is based on his argument for the universal salvation of God. The all-loving God is at the center of all religions. This central view of Hick's expresses itself in the title of one of his books, God Has Many Names (1982). Hindus are devoted to Krishna, Muslims call God Allah, and Christians find God in Christ. All worship the same God--known by different names. The argument for plurality is derived from the universal salvific will of God.

In order to construct a pluralistic theology of religions, Hick revises the traditional understanding of Christology. In his two other books, The Myth of God Incarnate (1977)¹¹ and The Metaphor of God Incarnate (1995), Hick attacks the traditional understanding of the doctrine of incarnation, saying that incarnation should be taken mythologically and metaphorically rather than literally. Hick views the Christian belief in the incarnation and divinity of Jesus as mythic and

metaphorical.¹² By this he means that the early followers of Jesus tried to express what he meant *for them*. They encountered Jesus as “so powerfully God-conscious” that this experience led the early Christians to deify Jesus and designate him with titles such as Messiah or Son of God. Hick finds that the Jewish title “son of God,” though often used for the Messiah, could be applied to any extraordinary religious person; it indicated uniqueness, but not exclusivity (1973:115). As a matter of fact, Hick makes use of modern biblical scholarship to insist that Jesus did not designate himself Messiah or Son of God, or accept any such confession about himself from others (1980:184; 1973:113-14). Hick thus argues that

the meaning of Christ-event was first expressed by saying that Jesus was the Messiah, to whom in the Old Testament God had said, ‘Thou art my beloved Son’; and then this divine sonship was later understood as his being of one substance with God the Father. This led in turn to the conclusion that Jesus was God incarnate, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. (1973:116)

Hick’s argument clearly indicates that the early followers were involved in the deification process of Jesus. The early church creeds and formulas drew heavily on Greek philosophical concepts and worldviews in “ontologizing” the mythical images of “son of God” and “incarnation” into absolute and exclusive categories (Knitter 1985:150). This process involved a significant transition from “‘Son of God’ to ‘God the Son,’ the Second Person of the Trinity” (Hick 1980:183-84). A metaphorical son of God became the metaphysical God the son, of the same substance as the Father. The process finally culminated in making Jesus as God and only Savior.

Hick's intention is to recognize the mythological nature of the christological language in order to make Christ relative. He insists that the statement that Jesus was "God Incarnate, or the Son of God, or God the Son," is not a statement of a literal fact. Rather, it is "a poetic, or symbolic, or mythological statement" (1980:185). For Hick, the fundamental heresy is to treat the incarnation as a factual hypothesis (1980:186). He takes the Incarnation mythologically and not literally.¹³

Hick speculates that if Christianity had happened to move eastward into India instead of westward into a European culture, it is probable that instead of Jesus being identified as the divine Logos or the divine Son "he would have been identified as a Bodhisattva," as the one who had attained to nirvana and then lived out his human life in order to show others the way to the same experience (1973:117; 1977:168-69).

For Hick, giving a mythological meaning to the Incarnation of Jesus

is a way of saying that Jesus is our living contact with the transcendent God. In his presence we find that we are brought into the presence of God. We believe that he is so truly God's servant that in living as his disciples we are living according to the divine purpose. And as our sufficient and saving point of contact with God there is for us something absolute about him which justifies the absolute language which Christianity has developed. Thus reality is being expressed mythologically when we say that he is the Son of God, God Incarnate, the Logos made flesh. (1980:186)

When Hick applies a mythological language to the Incarnation,¹⁴ it then becomes proper for Hick to argue that Christians no longer have to declare that Jesus is the only effective and saving point of contact with God. He says,

We can revere Christ as the one through whom we have found salvation, without having to deny other points of reported saving contact between God and man. We can commend the way of Christian faith without having to discommend other ways of faith. We can say that there is salvation in Christ without having to say that there is no salvation other than in Christ. (1980:186)

By this Hick means that Christians can declare that God is truly to be encountered in Jesus, but not only in Jesus. Christians can announce that Jesus is the center and norm for their lives, but without insisting the same for all other religions.¹⁵ Jesus, God incarnate, is unique to Christians, and therefore his uniqueness should be confined to Christianity. Jesus Christ should not become the criterion to judge or fulfill other religions.

Hick argues that Christians do not have to believe that Jesus was God or the second person of the Trinity in order to accept his teachings about the love of God. When Buddhists can accept and live by Gautama's teachings and Muslims the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, without believing that any of these great teachers was God incarnate, why cannot Christians faithfully follow Jesus without believing that Jesus was himself God? (Hick 1995b:105-6). Hick's Copernican model expresses the validity of all religions for salvation. It is this kind of relativistic christology¹⁶ that Hick believes is necessary for interreligious dialogue. For him Christian mission is mutual mission of sharing experiences and insights, mutual enrichment and cooperation. The approach of Christians to the people of other faiths should not be one of conversion but of mutual learning and togetherness.

Like Hick, Paul Knitter also demonstrates a paradigm shift from a christocentric to a theocentric orientation in Christian theology. In his classic book No Other Name? (1985), Knitter proposes a "theocentric christology."¹⁷ Knitter in the Preface to The Myth of Christian Uniqueness (1987b) describes the pluralist position as "a move from the insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity toward the recognition of the independent validity of other ways." The contributors to The Myth of Christian Uniqueness came to describe this kind of move as "the crossing of a theological Rubicon" (1987b:viii).

Knitter admits that "Jesus is unique, but with a uniqueness defined by its ability to relate to--that is, to include and be included by--other unique religious figures" (1985:171-72). He sees Jesus "not as exclusive or even as normative, but as *theocentric*, as a universally relevant manifestation (sacrament, incarnation) of divine revelation and salvation" (1985:172). Knitter takes the New Testament accounts very seriously, and unlike Hick, he shows that his theocentric model of christology is faithful to the central teaching of the New Testament (1985:172).

Knitter claims that Jesus was theocentric, and his mission, message, and person "were profoundly kingdom-centered, which means God-centered" (1985:173). Knitter, like Hick, says that Jesus did not think of himself as divine. "Jesus never takes the place of God. Even in the three texts in which Jesus is proclaimed as God or as divine (John 1:1, 20:28; Hebrews 1:8-9), an evident subordination is preserved" (1985:174). Knitter further argues that even if Jesus

claimed to be the Son of God or one with God, we know nothing of such claims from the New Testament record (1985:174). He, however, holds that the New Testament data do indicate that Jesus was aware of a special, unique relationship with God and his role in God's plan (1985:174). This special intimacy or special sonship, Knitter argues, does not automatically imply exclusivity. The original message of Jesus was theocentric. But after his death and resurrection, the original message of Jesus was significantly changed by the early church, and "the proclaimer became the proclaimed" (1985:173).¹⁸

How did Jesus' original message of the kingdom of God come to be transformed by the early communities' proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, Christ, Word, Savior, Son of God, and finally God the Son? To answer this question, like Hick, Knitter accepts the evolutionary model for the early Christian understanding of Jesus. He rejects C.F.D. Moules' argument that development is a more accurate model than evolution for understanding early progression in christological thinking.¹⁹ This evolutionary model helps Knitter to argue that Jesus did not think of himself in divine terms. It was an evolution in the early followers' understanding of Jesus as they interacted with Jewish and Hellenistic groups and made use of their mythic or symbolic images. What we see in the New Testament, then, is an "evolution from a predominantly functional, eschatological understanding of Jesus as Son of God to an incarnational, even ontological, proclamation of his divinity" (Knitter 1985:180).²⁰

Since Knitter's understanding of the New Testament christology is evolutionary, he readily rejects the christological trajectories and titles as definitive or normative for all time. Although he admits that the New Testament presents Jesus in "one and only " terms. This however does not mean, according to Knitter, that Jesus is the only mediator between God and humankind, the only One through whom one can receive salvation. Knitter says that this has to do with the nature of christological language in the New Testament.²¹ He echoes Hick in saying that these trajectories or images of Jesus in the New Testament must be understood not "as photographs, but as impressionistic paintings" (1985:180). Christological language in the New Testament is mythical or figurative, not literal.

Knitter further suggests that the Christians of the first and second centuries belonged to "classicist culture," a culture different from contemporary "historical culture" (1985:183). Knitter argues that the Christians of classicist culture took for granted that "truth was one, certain, unchanging, normative." If the truth of Jesus had either to conquer or absorb other truth-claims that they encountered in the world around them, the early Christians, according to Knitter, would have to describe the truth of Jesus as the only or the final truth (1985:183). Today, however, Christians live in the world of historical culture, a culture described by historical consciousness and a new experience of pluralism. It is then possible for Christians, Knitter argues, "to feel and announce the saving truth about Jesus and his message without the requirements of classicist culture-

-that is, without having to insist that Jesus' truth is either exclusive or inclusive of all other truth" (1985:183).

Knitter claims that the exclusivistic christological language of the New Testament was more of a "confessional language" or a "love language." Seen from a sociological perspective, it can also be called a "survival language" (1985:184-85). The historical context of the early church reveals that the church was in a minority status. The early Christians were faced with the danger of either being stomped out by larger groups or of being absorbed by syncretism. It was necessary for the survival of the Christian community. To survive against these dangers, the early Christians defined Jesus in absolute terms, by declaring him as the one and only savior. This helped the Christian community to give themselves an identity different from that of all their opponents and competitors (Knitter 1985:184). According to Knitter, the absolute and exclusive quality of New Testament christology, understood from such a sociological perspective,

tells us more about the social situation of the early church than about the ontological nature of Jesus. This language was more moral than metaphysical. Its purpose was more to define identity and membership within the community than to define the person of Jesus for all time. (1985:184)

The sociological function of christology, says Knitter, reveals the basic nature of the exclusivist language about Jesus in the New Testament. For example, when Peter states that "there is no other name by which we can be saved" (Acts 4:12), or when Jesus is called the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Timothy 2:5), the intention here is not to make an absolute metaphysical

claim which categorically rules out the possibility of other saviors or mediators.

Rather, it is their confession to proclaim a personal relationship and a commitment to define what it meant to belong to Jesus. It is not the language of “philosophy, science, or dogmatics,” but rather “the language of confession and testimony” (Knitter 1985:185). It is not the language of scientists, but of lovers.²²

Exclusivist christological language is thus much like the language an adoring husband would use in speaking of his wife: “She is the most beautiful woman in the world. She is the only woman for me.” Such statements, in the context of the marriage relationship, are certainly true. But it would be absurd to assume that his wife could win any beauty contest she entered, or that absolutely no one on earth is as beautiful as his wife (1985:185). These statements simply point to the fact that for him she has no rivals; he is absolutely committed to her.²³ Similarly, according to Knitter, “in describing Jesus as ‘the only,’ Christians were not trying to elaborate a metaphysical principle but a personal relationship and a commitment that defined what it meant to belong to this community” (1985:185).

Knitter’s attempt is not to do away with christology. Rather, like Hick, he attempts to relativize christology in order to make room for other religious saviors and mediators. That is why he argues in his recent book, Jesus and the Other Names (1996), that confessing Jesus “truly” does not require proclaiming him “only.” Knitter says, “Christians can and must affirm within their own communities and before the world that all the marvelous things said about Jesus in the New

Testament apply to him *truly*, but not necessarily *solely*" (1996:72). Christians can experience Jesus as truly the Son of God and their savior. Their experience, however, does not assert that Jesus is the only savior. This experience is limited because they have not taken in the experiences and messages of other saviors and religious figures (Knitter 1996:72). The possibility of other saviors or mediators is no impediment to a faithful following of Jesus. Knitter, like Hick, argues that Christians do not have to know that Jesus is the "only" savior in order to be committed to this "truly" Jesus. "Discipleship requires 'truly'; it does not seem to require 'solely'" (Knitter 1996:73).

In an attempt to construct a relativistic christology, Knitter replaces an absolute adverb with a relative one. "Only" is replaced with "truly." He then goes on to replace three absolute adjectives with three relative ones. Since Knitter understands Jesus in terms of "truly," he thus argues that Jesus cannot be described or proclaimed as God's "full, definitive, and unsurpassable" truth. Jesus is "a universal, decisive, indispensable" truth of God (Knitter 1996:76-79).²⁴ These revised adjectives applied to Jesus suggest that Jesus is one among many. That is to affirm that "there are *other* universal, decisive, indispensable manifestations of divine reality besides Jesus" (Knitter 1996:79).

In this section I attempted to show that both Hick and Knitter contend for a relativistic christology. A christology that maintains Christians can and should continue to profess and proclaim Jesus as absolute and normative for them, and at the same time can and should recognize that there are other saviors and

mediators who are equally unique and normative for their followers. Certainly God/the Real was present and active in Jesus. But this can also be said for Buddha, Krishna, and Muhammad. Each can be regarded as authentic prophet or savior for his followers. None can be claimed to be universally normative for all peoples in all cultures. Jesus is a decisive revelation of God to Christians. Muhammad is a prophet from God to Muslims. Krishna is a unique revelation of God to Hindus (Hick 1995b:23-24). Following the teaching and example of these revealers, people can continue to find and experience the saving truth and grace of God in their own cherished religious traditions. And at the same time each religious tradition can and should learn from the other to know the full truth of God.²⁵ The absoluteness of Jesus for Christians is only relative. Jesus defines God for Christians, but God is not confined to Jesus (Knitter 1996:77-78; Netland 1991:260).

Since all religious traditions are in touch with the same ultimate divine reality, the logical conclusion is, then, all religious traditions will reach the same goal. Thus Hick and Knitter argue that different religions point to the same religious end. The end goal of all major religious traditions is one--salvation.

Soteriological Oneness

Hick believes that although, the major world religions have different views of the nature of salvation, they all share a common ethical ideal or a common soteriological structure, i.e. a "transition from a radically unsatisfactory state to a limitless better one" (1985:69).²⁶ Hick suggests that salvation/liberation is the

central concern of all the great world religions. These religions are not primarily philosophies or theologies but “primarily ways of salvation/liberation” (1995b:18). Salvation, in Hick’s view, is “an actual human transformation, intended to begin now, from natural self-centredness to a radically new orientation centred in the Divine, the Transcendent, the Real” (1995b:112,18). This process, Hick believes, is taking place not only within Christianity, but also, to a more or less equal extent, within the other great world religions (1995b:18; 1985:86-87).

Hick argues that although each religious tradition may diagnose the human condition in different ways as fallen sinful humanity in Christianity, or as the blindness of *avidya* in Hinduism, or a centering in the self-positing ego in Buddhism--the end goal of all these religions is one. It is to transform humanity from “self-centredness to Reality-centredness” (Hick 1995b:106-7). This is what I am calling soteriological oneness. Hick argues for the plurality of revelations, plurality of mediators or saviors, and plurality of ways to diagnose the human conditions. But he speaks of salvation not in terms of plurality but in terms of singularity.²⁷ All religions function with and move to one common goal. And this one common goal is soteriological.

Hick is aware of the fact that the different religious traditions teach different moral and spiritual paths to attain their different aims. For example, in Christianity it is a conversion; in Islam it is a life lived in a complete submission to Allah; in theistic Hinduism it is a full devotion to Shiva, or to Vishnu incarnate as Krishna; and in advaitic Hinduism it is transcending self and becoming one with

the Brahman. Hick, however, believes that "these different paths are all forms of a gradual transformation from self-centredness to a new centring in the Real" (1995b:107). That is to say these different paths do not end up with different religious ends. The paths may be different but the end is one. Whatever path one takes, reaches the same goal. The religious end of all major religions is one. There is a soteriological oneness in all religious traditions. All religions lead to the Real. The goal of every religion is to move its respective believers from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. The end is one. It is salvation, not salvations.

Hick affirms that the religions begin and end in the realm of the Real. The teachings of the various religions concerning the nature of salvation constitute

variations within different conceptual schemes on a single fundamental theme: the sudden or gradual change of the individual from an absorbing self-concern to a new centring in the supposed unity-of-reality-and-value that is thought of as God, Brahman, the Dharma, Sunyata or the Tao. Thus the generic concept of salvation/liberation, which takes a different specific form in each of the great traditions, is that of the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. (Hick 1989:36)

Since the religious end or aim is one, Hick seems to suggest that the cessation of self in Buddhism, the realization of the actual self in Brahman which is "non-dual" in advaitic Hinduism, and communion with the triune God in Christianity are identical. They all point to the one and the same goal.

Hick not only sees a common soteriological structure in all great religions, he also believes this common soteriological structure provides the pragmatic

criterion for grading or evaluating the validity of different religious traditions. He states,

religious phenomena--patterns of behavior, experiences, beliefs, myths, theologies, cultic acts, liturgies, scriptures, and so forth--can in principle be assessed and graded; and the basic criterion is the extent to which they promote or hinder the great religious aim of salvation/liberation. (1985:86)

The pragmatic criterion grades different religions higher or lower on the basis of "their success or failure in fulfilling the soteriological function" (Hick 1985:80). An authentic religion is soteriologically effective. It makes it possible to transform human existence from self-centredness to Reality centredness (Hick 1985:80). That is why Hick considers Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam as the great world religions. They are all concerned with salvation. They are all soteriologically effective. They all share a common soteriological goal and a common understanding of what constitutes salvation (Hick 1985:79-83; Netland 1991:159-160).

Hick argues that one should not think all religious leaders or all religious teachings are equally valid or equally in touch with the Real. There is a difference between, say, Jim Jones and St. Francis of Assisi, or between the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and those of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Hick contends that the basic criterion must be soteriological to evaluate what is and what is not an authentic response to the Real. Religious traditions "have greater or less value according as they promote or hinder the salvific transformation" (1989:300).

Thus in Hick's pluralistic theology of religions, soteriological structure is not only common to all major religious traditions, it also provides the pragmatic criterion for making distinction between authentic and inauthentic manifestations of the Real. Salvation is an evident reality of all major religions. All religious traditions teach and provide effective paths of salvation. The paths may be different, but they all lead to one and the same goal--"transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness."

Knitter, like Hick, also contends that all the major world religions are concerned about the theme of salvation. Knitter revises his theocentric approach to theology of religions in favor of "soteriocentrism." He says,

If Christian attitudes have evolved from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism to theocentrism, they must now move on to what in Christian symbols might be called 'kingdom-centrism' or more universally 'soteriocentrism.' (1987a:187)

Knitter moves from theocentrism to soteriocentrism precisely because he thinks that the theme salvation provides a cross-cultural and cross-religious basis in the context of interreligious dialogue. A theocentric model is limited to only a few religions. Whereas a soteriocentric model is accepted more universally. All religions and cultures deal with the theme of salvation in one way or the other. Thus he argues that it is the "soteria" that unites the religions in "common discourse and praxis" (1987a:187). The basis and the goal for interreligious dialogue is not how these religions are related to Christ or to God, but rather,

to what extent they are promoting *Soteria* (in Christian images, the *basileia*)--to what extent they are engaged in promoting human welfare and bringing about liberation with and for the poor and nonpersons. (1987a:187)

Knitter, unlike Hick, understands salvation in social terms, nevertheless both view salvation as singular. Knitter views salvation in social terms because his theology of religions is greatly influenced by liberation theology²⁸ since the publication of his influential book No Other Name? (1985). He proposes as the common ground for religious encounter not “*Theos*, the ineffable mystery of the divine, but rather, *Soteria*, the ineffable mystery of salvation” (1987a:187). Knitter believes that

A soteriocentric approach to other faiths also seems to be more faithful to the data of comparative religions, for although the religions of the world contain a divergent variety of models for the Ultimate--theistic, metatheistic, polytheistic, and atheistic--the common thrust, however, remains *soteriological*, the concern of most religions being *liberation* (*vimukti*, *moksa*, *nirvana*) rather than speculation about a hypothetical divine liberator. (1987a:187)

The common concern and the end goal of all religions is, then, *Soteria*. And *Soteria*, according to Knitter, is “a shared concern for the promotion of human welfare and the removal of human suffering” (1987a:187; 1988:22). In other words, salvation is human welfare which is this-worldly.

Knitter believes that phenomenologically all religions seem to share a general common concern for salvation. This common soteriocentric core suggests that all religions identify some “dissatisfying or broken state of human affairs” and that all religions promise salvation from this broken state of affairs (1988:26). Thus it can be said that the goal of every religion is essentially to promote human welfare. Salvation conceived in all religions is a this-worldly concern.

Knitter defines salvation primarily in this-worldly categories. This is further confirmed by his implicit criticism of Christianity and other religions which focus on other-worldly salvation. In these religious traditions, Knitter says,

there is a flight from the world and from responsibility and concern for it, either through an eschatological vision of our true home in the next life or through a dualistic retreat into a spiritual-mystical center insulated from the sufferings of this vale of tears. (1988:27)

Since these religious traditions are primarily concerned about other-worldly spiritualities, Knitter suggests we choose “not to dialogue with such other-worldly religions” (1987a:199).

Knitter further argues that before the mystery of *Soteria*, no mediator or symbol system is absolute. “Our ‘Absolute’ is not Christ, or even God. It is, rather, *soteria*--human salvation” (1988:30). The end goal of all religions is to repair the broken state of affairs in which human beings find themselves. Here Knitter, like Hick, suggests that all religions diagnose the problem as essentially a self-centredness and in different ways seek to remedy this self-centredness by encouraging and giving direction for a Reality-centredness (1988:28; 1985:147-49).

By giving direction to people from a self-centredness to a Reality-centredness, Knitter contends that “all religions, therefore, can be seen as ‘forms of resistance’ to the confines of the status quo and as visions of liberation” (1988:28). Each religious tradition may have a different understanding of how to promote *Soteria*/liberation, but the aim and the goal of all religious traditions is one and the same--human welfare (1987a:190).

Knitter contends that, while all religions are potentially equal, not all religions are necessarily equal. Like Hick, Knitter also makes salvation the pragmatic criterion for grading and evaluating the authenticity of different religious traditions and figures. Knitter claims that the theme of salvation will provide a concrete basis by which religions can both validate their own claims and judge others: "From their ethical, soteriological fruits we shall know them--we shall be able to judge whether and how much other religious paths and their mediators are salvific" (1987a:193). All religions and religious figures will be graded on the basis of their engagement in promoting human welfare in this world. The religious end of all religions is *Soteria*, Christians should, then, accept the fact that Jesus along with other saviors and mediators help fulfill this goal.

There is a soteriological oneness, Hick and Knitter argue. The thesis of an identical religious end for all serves a basic presupposition in their soteriological understanding. They accept the fact of different paths in each religion to achieve the goal. They deny, however, that each religion has a different religious end. Both Hick and Knitter echo Mahatma Gandhi who wrote in 1938: "Religions are different roads converging to the same point," and asked "what does it matter if we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause for quarreling?" (Gandhi 1938:36). The assumption that there are many paths to one religious end is a crucial constitutive element of the pluralistic theology of religions.

Many and not One: Pluralistic Theology of Religions

It is evident from the description of Hick and Knitter that they choose to universalize the scope of revelation and relativize the particularity of Christ. They have done this by departing from the insistence on the finality of Christ toward recognition of the independent validity of other ways (Knitter 1987b:viii). They react against the traditional view of Christianity and argue that Christians have not considered carefully enough the validity of other religious traditions and their claims. If Hinduism is false, how is it that Mahatma Gandhi could live a morally exemplary life as a Hindu? If Christianity is uniquely true, why are there so many saints in other religious traditions? They also make use of critical historical scholarship to demonstrate that the “one and only” claims of the New Testament were used mythologically, not literally. Texts such as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 were not actually said by Jesus. They were attributed to him. Thus they cannot be interpreted as supporting that Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God and that salvation is available only through Christ.

Based on all these above and other factors, Hick and Knitter contend for a pluralistic theology of religions which affirms many independent ways to the Real. The commonality of revelation sets all religions on an equal footing. All religions are in touch with, and human responses to, the same Ultimate Reality. No one religion or religious figure can claim to be superior or normative over the others. All religions and mediators are valid paths for salvation for their respective believers. Jesus Christ thus loses his unique, universal title--“Savior of

the world," and becomes one among many. The "one and only" claim of the New Testament is changed to "many not one" claim to suit the pluralistic theology of religions.

The pluralistic theology of religions departs from christocentricity to theocentricity, and then moves from a theocentric to a soteriocentric stance primarily to affirm "manyness" in favor of "onlyness." Indian theologian Stanley Samartha, in support of pluralistic theology, states

Where alternative ways of salvation have provided meaning and purpose for millions of persons in other cultures for more than two or three thousand years, to claim that the Judeo-Christian-Western tradition has the only answer to all problems in all places and for all persons in the world is presumptuous. (1987:77)

Faced with the particularity of Christ, on the one hand, and the plurality of religions, on the other, the pluralists relativize the particularity of Christ in order to affirm the plurality of religions. The proponents, in favor of many saviors, dismiss that Christ is uniquely true and thus universally valid, and that salvation is possible only through him. Compared to the historical reality of dialectical tension, the pluralistic theology of religions, contending for many and not one, snaps the dialectical tension between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions, and thus falls into the either-or category.

We now move onto the exclusivistic view of theology of religions which swings the pendulum to the other side in favor of Christian particularism.

¹ D'Costa argues that Troeltsch was to be the father of twentieth-century pluralism and Hick was definitely influenced by his theology. See D'Costa (1987:19ff.).

² Wayne Johnson (1994:27-28), based on this statement, points to the three elements which sum up Knitter's understanding of revelation: First, it is experiential; second, it is informative; and third, revelation only occurs when it has been received.

³ Hick commonly means the great world religions, not primitive religion nor religious movements (1982:56). The great world religions include theistic and non-theistic forms of religion (Hick 1982: 24-25). See also Carruthers (1990:20-21).

⁴ In his more recent work, Hick has dropped the word "God" and instead talks of *Reality* or the *Real* or *Ultimate Reality* (Hick 1995b:18, 46ff.). In the 1980s he referred to God as *the Eternal One*, mainly to accommodate non-theistic religions into his pluralistic theology (1982:42ff.).

⁵ See for further discussion Knitter (1985:147-148).

⁶ My personal assumption is that this is because Hick is more of a philosopher and Knitter is a theologian.

⁷ Johnson (1994:20ff.) says that Knitter offers three distinct but interrelated lines of argument for the universal possibility of revelation in religions. These arguments are theological, historical, and dialogical deriving from the necessity of dialogue.

⁸ See Knitter (1985:116ff.). He comments, "Is it not a rather capricious, teasing God, who offers just enough knowledge of divinity to frustrate persons, or to confirm them in their sinfulness?" He thinks that the traditional understanding of general revelation threatens belief in a God of love.

⁹ Knitter is reacting against exclusive and inclusive approaches to interreligious dialogue.

¹⁰ Some of what I have stated here comes from Johnson (1994:24ff.).

¹¹ This is edited by Hick and he has an article in it.

¹² Myth is defined by Hick as "a story which is told but which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to someone or something but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearer" (1977:178). Cf. Hick (1989:ch19).

¹³ According to Hick the myth of incarnation is much like the *Trikaya* myth with which Mahayana Buddhists attempted to speak about the Mystery they had encountered in Buddha (Hick 1987:31). See also Knitter (1985:254).

¹⁴ There are other theologians who also apply mythological language to the Incarnation. For example, John A.T. Robinson gives mythological interpretation to the Incarnation to mean not that Jesus is "of one substance" (*homoousios*) but "of one love" (*homoagape*) with the Father (1979:102, 116-17, 119-21). Race sees all metaphysical claims of preexistence and of divine-human union in Jesus as purely mythological and also see Jesus as the decisive focus of God's activity not for all the light everywhere in the world, but for the vision he has brought to one cultural setting (1983:129, 135-36). See also the contributors to *The Myth of God Incarnate*, (Hick 1977).

¹⁵ See also Knitter's interpretation of Hick's mythological understanding of the Incarnation in (1985:149-52).

¹⁶ Knitter calls Hick's christology a *non-normative christology* (1985:152).

¹⁷ Knitter's views on christology have changed somewhat since the publication of *No Other Name?* (1985). See his "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions" (1987), and "Theocentric Christology: Defended and Transcended" 1987:41-52), and *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (1996).

¹⁸ Knitter says Hick is right; Jesus gave us no christology. Of all the titles that came to be bestowed on him, none of them was self applied--with the possible and acutely controversial exception of "the Son of Man" (1985:174).

¹⁹ Knitter understands the New Testament christology as part of a gradual process. This process is described as a "development" or as an "evolution." Process as development means new insights into the meaning of what was there all along in the original message and person of Jesus. See Moule (1977:3-4, 135). Process as evolution means that symbols and images that were employed although in continuity with the communities' original experience of Jesus, they were genuinely different from what was earlier understood. See Knitter (1985:178-79).

²⁰ What was important for Paul was Christ's incarnation in Christians, not so much God's incarnation in Christ. Knitter (1985:179).

²¹ Knitter suggests that all the "one and only" qualifiers to the various christological titles pertain more to the *medium* used by the New Testament writers than to its core *message* (1985:182).

²² In the words of Krister Stendahl, whom Knitter quotes, this is "love language, caressing language" (Knitter 1985:185). Cf. Stendahl (1981:14).

²³ See Netland for more elaboration on this point (1991:251-53).

²⁴ Notice that Knitter says "a" rather than "the."

²⁵ The assumption here is that the knowledge of God is partial in all faiths, including Christianity. See Race (1982:72).

²⁶ Hick follows Karl Jaspers's notion of the "axial period" of religious experience (Hick 1980:182-83).

²⁷ For further discussion see Heim (1994:341-60;1995).

²⁸ Liberation theology believes that without a commitment to and with the oppressed, our knowledge is deficient--our knowledge of self, others, the Ultimate. This is not to imply that liberation theologians can know the truth only in such a commitment but, rather, that without this option for the poor, the truth that they may know is, at best, incomplete, deficient, dangerous. (Knitter 1987:182-86). See also Segundo (1976); Sobrino (1978); Boff (1978).

CHAPTER 4

Christian Exclusivism: An Absolute Reality

Not even the pluralists deny that the New Testament intends to present the Christian faith as an absolute reality. For many centuries, both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic churches have maintained an exclusivist approach to other religions. The axiom of the Catholic Church, *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church no salvation), has, until Vatican II, played a decisive role in the Roman Catholic Church's relations with the people of other faiths (Küng 1967:26).

The exclusivist attitude also dominated the three great Protestant International Missionary Conferences of Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928), and Tambaram (1938). It was also a predominant attitude of the World Council of Churches, at least up to 1966, the year which ended the General Secretaryship of Dr. W.A. Visser't Hooft (Race 1982:11). In an address given ten years ago, Newbigin states that even today we are challenged to "look at the matter from the perspective not of 1988, but of 1938" (1988:326).

The Christian exclusivist paradigm strongly maintains commitment to Jesus Christ as being the full and final revelation of God. Salvation is available only through Jesus Christ. There is no possibility of salvation by any means in other religions. Christ or Christianity offers the only valid path to salvation. This view is opposed to the pluralist position.

Hendrik Kraemer, a Dutch missionary-theologian, in his book The

Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (1938) which serves as the classic book on exclusivism, stresses the relationship of Christ with other religions as one of discontinuity rather than fulfillment and mutual appreciation. Kraemer maintains that in the world of religions the Christ and the Cross cannot be compromised; hence, conversion to Christ is vitally important. The missionary's main aim is "to persuade the non-Christian world to surrender to Christ as the sole Lord of Life" (1938:444). This attitude to other religious traditions is identified as exclusivist.¹

Ronald H. Nash, a Reformed theologian, in his recent book Is Jesus the Only Savior? (1994), challenges pluralism and inclusivism and contends, like Kraemer, for an exclusivistic theology of religions. Nash argues that adult individuals must consciously place their faith in Jesus Christ if they are to be saved.

In this chapter I will attempt to describe the positions of Hendrik Kraemer and Ronald Nash, the primary contenders for an exclusivistic theology of religions, which maintain the absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ, argue for revelational discontinuity, christological finality, and soteriological exclusivity. I will conclude the chapter with a brief evaluation.

The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ

The issue of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, Newbiggin writes, is "the life-and-death question for the missionary" (1969:8). The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is a fundamental element of Christian belief, says Ronald Nash (1994:75).

Christian exclusivism, in contrast to religious pluralism, holds the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as an absolute reality. The non-Christian religions do not contain the revelation of God. Jesus Christ is the final revelation of God. He is the only way of salvation. Only Christianity and Christ have the ultimate answer and path to salvation.

The pluralists, Hick and Knitter, understand Christian uniqueness in a relative or mythological sense. They begin their book The Myth of Christian Uniqueness (1987) by explaining that

We are calling "Christian uniqueness" a "myth," not because we think that talk of the uniqueness of Christianity is purely and simply false, and so to be discarded. Rather, we feel that such talk, like all mythic language, must be understood carefully; it must be interpreted; its "truth" lies not on its literal surface but within its ever-changing historical and personal meaning. (Knitter 1987b:vii; 1997:3-16)

Both Hick and Knitter assume that the idea of the uniqueness in Christianity signifies the unique definitiveness, absoluteness, normativeness, superiority of Christianity in comparison with other religions of the world (Knitter 1987b:vii). They reject uniqueness in this sense. Christianity is unique for pluralists only the way any religion is unique. Hinduism is as unique as Christianity because Hinduism is also an equally acceptable path to God/The Real.

The pluralists treat the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in a similar way. Jesus Christ, they argue, is the unique founder of their faith as Krishna is for Hindus, Buddha for Buddhists, and Muhammad for Muslims. The founders of these other

religions are as unique in their way as Jesus is in his. In other words, contrary to exclusivists, pluralists argue that Jesus' uniqueness is relative, not absolute. Nash, replying to pluralists, says that "this watered-down sense of uniqueness has nothing to do with absoluteness or superiority" (1994:76).

The exclusivist position defines the term "uniqueness" neither in the sense that Jesus is unique in the same way anyone who has ever lived is unique, nor in the sense that Jesus is unique in the same way as Krishna or Buddha. The uniqueness of Jesus is expressed and found in Christian faith as an absolute reality. That is to say that the term "uniqueness" refers to the traditional identification of Jesus as God the Son, Second Person of the Trinity, who was incarnated in human form, was crucified and rose from the dead all for the salvation of the world. The Lausanne Covenant affirmed the uniqueness of Jesus Christ by stating that Jesus is the "only God-man. . . the only mediator between God and man" and that there is "no other name" (Stott 1975b:14). Similarly, for Nash, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ means that "he is the one and only mediator between God and man, the one and only Savior" (1994:75).

Since exclusivists affirm the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as an absolute reality, there is very little room left open for God's revelation in other religions. Contrary to pluralists, exclusivists opt for a discontinuity of Christian revelation with other religious traditions.

Revelational Discontinuity

Karl Barth was the most influential theologian in modern time to theologically undergird the position of exclusivism.² Barth emphasized the absoluteness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ attested in the Bible. His understanding of the revelation of God is so thoroughly exclusive that Barth sees no relation whatsoever between religion and God's revelation. According to Barth,

Religion is unbelief. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man. . . . From the standpoint of revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and willfully evolved by man. (1956:299-300)

There is total discontinuity between God's revelation in Jesus Christ and human religion. Barth thus asserts that theologians or missionaries should not in any way seek to establish a relationship between Christian revelation and the religions. In no way should they seek "points of contact." The relationship between the Christian revelation and the religions is an "either-or." The "slightest deviation" or "the slightest concession" from Christian revelation "to religionism" nullifies the Christian message (1956:94-96).

Barth's harsh verdict on religions includes Christianity as well. He insists that Christianity as a religion too "stands under the judgment that religion is unbelief" (1956:327). There is no empirical evidence that suggests that Christianity is any better than any other religion, Barth asserts (1956:327).

However, on the one hand, Barth claims that Christianity is the true religion and different from all other religions. "The divine fact of the name of Jesus Christ confirms what no other fact does or can confirm: the creation and election of this religion [Christianity] to be the one and only true religion" (1956:365). Barth justifies Christianity not because Christianity is inherently good, but because he believes Christianity alone knows God's divine revelation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ (1956:344-347). Knitter comments on Barth's understanding of one true religion: "The *reason* there can be *only* one true religion is that *revelation and salvation are offered only in Jesus Christ*" (1985:85).³ According to Barth,

Revelation does not link up with a human religion which is already present and practiced. It contradicts it, just as religion previously contradicted revelation. It displaces it, just as the religion previously displaced revelation; just as faith cannot link up with a mistaken faith, but must contradict and displace it as unbelief, as an act of contradiction. (1980:39)

The third missionary conference of the International Missionary Council, held at Tambaram, India, in 1938, debated the issue of whether God's revelation as expressed in Christian faith is continuous or discontinuous with other religious traditions. The Dutch missiologist and theologian Hendrik Kraemer, profoundly influenced by the theology of Karl Barth, argued for a radical discontinuity between God's revelation in Jesus Christ and other religions. According to Kraemer:

The Christian revelation as the record of God's self-disclosing revelation in Jesus Christ, is absolutely *sue generis*. It is the story of God's sovereign redeeming acts having become decisively and finally manifest in Jesus Christ, the son of the Living God, in whom God became flesh and revealed His grace and truth. (1939:1-2)

Kraemer raised the issue of revelation in the form of a question. He asked, "From the standpoint of the Christian revelation, what answer can be given to the question: Does God--and if so, how and where does God--reveal Himself in the religious life as present in the non-Christian religions?" (1938:111)

Kraemer clearly stated his position on revelation that determined his whole approach. He stated, "God has revealed *the Way and the Life and the Truth* in Jesus Christ," and that in the light of this revelation "all religious life, the lofty and degraded, appear to be under the divine judgment, because it is *misdirected*" (1938:136). The starting point for Kraemer, like Barth, is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This stand is authenticated by his acceptance of the authority of the Bible. Consequently passages such as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 are taken literally, not metaphorically. Truth about God and humankind is revealed only in Jesus Christ, thus Christians are duty bound to proclaim this truth to all people (Kraemer 1938:107).

Kraemer argues that the major non-Christian religions are all human constructions of self-justification (1938:chs. 5,6,7). Consequently, they are opposed to the *sue generis* character of Christ's revelation. In other words, God's revelation in Jesus Christ "is not that of continuity, but of discontinuity" with other religious traditions (Kraemer 1939:2). Since the revelation of Christ brings judgment upon all religions, the points of contact and continuity are all irrelevant. Kraemer, like Barth, seems to think of revelation primarily in terms of God's incarnation. In the strict sense of the word, he argued, there is only one

revelation, that is God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ (1956:144; 1962:77). The notion of continuity or general revelation makes the event of the incarnation unnecessary. That is to say, if religion reveals God, what is the need for Jesus Christ? This is the reason why Kraemer rejects the notion of points of contact, continuity or natural theology.⁴

Kraemer, although influenced by the "Wholly Other" theology of Karl Barth (Barth 1978), showed some sympathy to other religions. Kraemer does not deny totally God's work in other religions and history. He points out revelation in nature, in human history, and in conscience. He states, "God shines through in a broken, troubled world: in reason, in nature and in history" (1938:120). For lack of a better term, Kraemer called these happenings general revelation; however he rejected the ideas of natural theology or general revelation, stressing only the divine disclosure as revealed in the Bible. When the meaning of general revelation is applied to other religious traditions, Kraemer did not intend to suggest "the possibility of the authentic and saving knowledge and fellowship with God outside the Christian faith" (Race 1982:19).

Walter M. Horton, a student of Hocking, criticized Kraemer for suggesting that the non-Christian religions had no real revelation, except for sporadic manifestation of it. Horton understood Kraemer's notion of revelation in the non-Christian religions in Barthian terms as "tokens of revelation" (1939:154-58). Furthermore, H. H. Farmer, commenting on Kraemer's concept of revelation, says that though

Dr Kraemer does in one place speak of God revealing Himself in

other religions; but no attempt is made to say what exactly is meant by the term in this connection, or to relate it to the more elaborate definition of revelation given elsewhere, and his general theory of religion remains one which is set forth in almost exclusively humanistic terms. (1939:176-77)

For Kraemer, other modes of God's revelation than God's self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ are of a different order, and therefore he suggests that the term revelation must be used for them with great circumspection (1956:381-82; Jathanna 1981:80-83). He contended that all other modes of God's revelation are to be judged in the light of the revelation in Christ.

Since the Word 'became Flesh' (incarnation) and equally because this same 'Word' is the eternal Logos, through whom all things are made and in whom is the light and life of man, it is impossible for Christian thinking to interpret God's revelation in nature, history and conscience as independent fields. Their interpretation can only be legitimately expressed in the light of the revelation in Christ. (Kraemer 1956:353)

Kraemer stressed that special revelation in Christ brings judgment over all religions. Kraemer, like Barth, emphasized the biblical record of the revelation of God. However, he was a little more open to adherents of other religions. Kraemer, not Barthian in the strict sense, was open to the possibility of revelation outside the Christian framework. But this possibility remains to be just a possibility, not points of contact. Kraemer expresses his position on discontinuity more forcefully in his final book, Why Christianity of All Religions? (1962): "If we are ever to know what true and divinely willed religion is, we can do this only through God's revelation in Jesus Christ and through nothing else" (1962:79). In the strict sense "there is only one revelation, that is, God's self-disclosure in

Christ" (1956:381).

When this is applied to other religious traditions Kraemer concludes: "In this light and in regard to their deepest, most essential purport they are all in error" (1962:93).⁵ Because of his stand on revelational discontinuity with other religions, "Kraemer is forced to deny any points of contact or similarity" (D'Costa 1986:64).⁶

Ronald Nash, another exclusivist, although functioning with the same premise of revelational discontinuity in his books The Word of God and the Mind of Man (1982) and Is Jesus the Only Savior? (1994), without neglecting totally a personal dimension of revelation, stresses heavily the propositional or cognitive dimension of revelation. He states:

Evangelicalism insists that personal knowledge of God is not in competition with propositional knowledge about God. The more person A *knows about* person B, the better A can *know* B in a *personal way*. What kind of encounter could take place between two blind, deaf, and dumb people who have absolutely no information about each other? God does not treat humankind in this impersonal way. Scripture declares that people require information about God that he has taken the initiative to supply (Hebrews 11:6; John 20:30; 1 John 1:1-3). Personal encounter cannot take place in a cognitive vacuum. Saving faith presupposes some genuine knowledge about God. (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4) (1982:46-47)

The propositional or cognitive knowledge about God, according to Nash, is recorded only in the Bible. Although he does not argue for the doctrine of verbal inspiration, he believes that some revelation conveys cognitive information about God. "Basic to the evangelical position is the claim that we can have cognitive information about God. Since a proposition is the minimal vehicle of truth, the

information about God is contained, in this view, in divinely, revealed propositions" (Nash 1982:45). That is to say, some revelation about God is cognitive and has been expressed in human language. This cognitive revelation expressed in human language is recorded in the Bible (Nash 1982:45-46). While criticizing the notion of personal revelation, Nash asserts that personal encounter cannot take place in a cognitive vacuum. Saving faith presupposes some genuine knowledge about God (1982:47). It is the information about God that distinguishes genuine encounter from "spurious religious experience," argues Nash (1982:47). Christian revelation has informational content. However, Nash suggests that propositional revelation should not be confused with the doctrine of verbal inspiration. A person could accept propositional revelation but reject verbal inspiration (Nash 1982:50). The doctrine of verbal inspiration, according to Nash, is concerned with the extent to which God's revelation is conveyed in words and phrases. "It has to do with the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the human authors of Scripture in their selection of words to convey the inspired ideas" (Nash 1982:50). The doctrine of propositional revelation, on the other hand, "does not hold that God's written revelation must assume a particular literary form" (1982:50). Nash asserts that the belief in propositional revelation does not deny the human element in Scripture. God used human authors and human language as a medium of revelation. This view of revelation entails that "some revelatory acts have a cognitive or informational character, and that this revealed truth is deposited in the various literary forms found in the Bible" (Nash

1982:54).

Since cognitive revelation is deposited only in the Bible, though in various literary forms, Nash does not perceive any revelational continuity between Christianity and other religious faiths. Even general revelation, according to him, does not provide any possibility of continuity. His argument is that general revelation, unlike propositional revelation or special revelation, does not contain revelatory information. "General revelation could not be revelation unless it imparted some information" (Nash 1995a:67). He sees general revelation in Creation, conscience, and history which, he believes, adequately discloses God as Creator, Ruler, and Judge, but lacks any content as such (Nash 1994:20).

Nash says,

A significant disagreement between exclusivists and inclusivists involves the possible role of general revelation in salvation. Inclusivists insist that people outside any sphere of Christian influence may nonetheless be saved by trusting in whatever they may learn from God's general revelation in Creation, conscience, and history. Exclusivists disagree. (1994:20)⁷

The role of general revelation, according to Nash, is then to bring condemnation upon the people of other religions rather than to provide points of contact or continuity. He indicates that general revelation becomes a vehicle not for salvation or a point of contact but for divine judgment (1994:21).⁸ To support his argument on the role of general revelation, Nash quotes Bruce Demarest who says general revelation

teaches no redemptive truths. But if general revelation . . . provides insufficient light for the salvation of the soul, it does nevertheless serve at least two practical ends. In the first place, general revelation leaves the unrepentant sinner without excuse.

Objectively, the divine self-disclosure in Creation, history, and conscience is sufficiently clear that God should be known as Creator, Ruler, and Judge. (cited in Nash 1994:20; Demarest 1982:69-70)

While attempting to show that general revelation brings condemnation and no continuity, Nash however leaves out the second purpose of general revelation identified by Demarest which interestingly indicates points of contact. General revelation, Demarest says, also

serves as a necessary prolegomenon to the divine special revelation. The evidence of Creation, history, and conscience establish a necessary point of contact between the sinner and the gospel. In Puritan thought, general revelation relates to special revelation as the foundation of a building to the superstructure. When God addresses man with His saving message in the living and written Word, man recognizes Him as God on the grounds of His preliminary universal disclosure. (1982:70)

Nash does not see any kind of point of contact between Christianity and other religions, precisely because he believes that other religious traditions are devoid of God's revelation, and thus they are false. Nash's stress on propositional revelation recorded in the Bible leaves no room for any other modes of God's revelation outside the Christian faith. For Nash, like Kraemer, if the role of general revelation is to bring judgment, then the notion of points of contact and continuity are all irrelevant. Nash would suggest then in the light of propositional revelation recorded in the Bible and historical revelation embodied in Jesus Christ, all other religious traditions are nothing but mere human construction. Affirming Christian exclusivism, he states, "If Christian exclusivism is true, then all these alternatives are false: Atheism, Universalism, Non-Christian

Religions, Pluralism, Inclusivism" (1994:21).

Both Kraemer and Nash see revelation as singular. God's revelation has a historical character which is embodied only in Jesus Christ, thus other religious traditions are devoid of even sparks of revelation. Revelation has an informational character which is recorded only in the Bible. God's revelation is confined to the Bible, thus there is no possibility of revelation beyond it. This singularity of revelation creates discontinuity between Christianity and other religions.

Revelation is singular and thus discontinuous precisely because Jesus Christ is the only revelation and salvation of God for this world. Pluralists such as Hick and Knitter argue for Christological relativity based on their notion of revelational commonness. Exclusivists like Kraemer and Nash, on the other hand, argue for revelational discontinuity based on their notion of Christological finality.

Christological Finality

Kraemer's theology is radically christocentric. According to him, one cannot speak of the creative and redemptive will of God without speaking of Christ, in whom this will has been and continues to be clearly, decisively and finally revealed (Kraemer 1938:445; 1956:381). Thus Kraemer can use the terms "theocentric" and "christocentric" together and interchangeably (1938:87). Kraemer describes the Christ-event in terms of decisiveness. However, he uses the terms "conclusively" and "finally" more or less synonymously with decisively

(Kraemer 1938:226, 445).⁹

The basic theological assumption with which Kraemer functions is that

Jesus Christ is the center of history, and that therefore the religious history of man before and after Him, till the end of history, can only be rightly understood in Him. He is God's decisive and final act of self-disclosure or revelation, and in Him all divine revelation, past, present, and future, has its proper criterion. (1956:237)¹⁰

Kraemer sees Christ's finality, first of all, in what God has done in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is a redemptive act of God. By means of Christ's atonement God has opened up a way where before there was no way (1938:76,211). God's act in Jesus Christ is "an objective act which changes the total world and life-situation, whether acknowledged or not" (Kraemer 1956:133). That is to say that the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ has provided the possibility for sinful people to have real fellowship with God (Kraemer 1938:91). God's revelation in Christ has brought an entirely new world of facts and norms, such as "never did rise within the heart of man" (Kraemer 1962:96).

Kraemer's understanding of Christ's finality, however, is not confined to Christ's action. Christ's being is equally significant for his finality. Kraemer argues that it is not only that God acted in Jesus, but Jesus himself is the act of God (1956:237). Comparing Jesus with other historical founders of religion, such as Muhammad and Buddha, Kraemer says that in Jesus' case it is not that he brought a revelation from God, but Jesus Christ is Himself the Revelation in His own Person and He is

likewise its substance. . . . He places Himself before the world as the Truth, the Way and the Life. He is not what the academic experts in the study of religion call a theophany (the manifestation

of a god). He is not the mediator of a Revelation, of a message imparted and entrusted to Him. As has been said already He is Himself 'God revealed', God's communication of Himself. . . . What He asks of every man is faith in Him as *such*. (1962:83)

Jesus, being himself the revelation, holds a distinctive place. A place which is quite distinct from that of Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius who are only "Messengers" or "Bearers" of the revelation, and not part of the revelation (Kraemer 1962:83). That is why Kraemer often repeats the phrase "the Self-disclosure of God" in Jesus Christ.¹¹

Kraemer's own starting point or truth criterion, is or can only be, the revelation and self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ. Because here alone, he argues, God has revealed Godself, and thus only in the light of the person of Jesus Christ can all other religions, including Christianity, be judged (1962:15; D'Casta:1986:56).

In Christ, Kraemer says, God has become flesh, and thus Christianity is not only the religion of revelation, but also "the religion of the Incarnation" (1938:73). This, Kraemer says, is the plain teaching of the Prologue of John. He summarizes the meaning of the passage: "the Logos, from eternity with God and Himself God, is the fact Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth" (1956:275). One can accept or reject it. But Kraemer states that "Our standpoint is to accept it as one of the grandest expressions of our faith in Christ and of the reality embodied in Christ" (1956:275). On the basis of this fact Kraemer asserts that the New Testament declares "Jesus to be unreservedly adored, bowed down to and served like God Himself" (1956:275).

Kraemer, unlike Hick and Knitter, sees the real significance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the fact that “it is not mythological; it is concrete and historical. It has to do not with an idea or a concept; but with an act and an event. It has to do with a Person” (1939:22).¹² Seen in this light, Kraemer affirms, Jesus Christ is the sole legitimate Lord of all human lives, and failure “to recognize Him as the sole legitimate Lord is to serve false gods” (1938:433). One can only gratefully and humbly acknowledge that “it has pleased God to reveal Himself fully and decisively in Christ” (Kraemer 1938:119). It is only in this light, Kraemer holds, that the Lordship or finality of Christ is the core of the Christian revelation. It is in this Christ, who himself is the revelation, the heart of God and the real condition of human being and the world are revealed (1956:237; Jathanna 1981:75). Kraemer thus presents Christ as the only legitimate and ultimate criterion and judge by citing the claim that he is *the* Way, *the* Truth and *the* Life (1956:237; 1962:16,17,117;).

Similarly, Nash, presenting Jesus as the only Savior, argues for the finality of Christ. Nash presents an extended critique of pluralistic and inclusivistic views, but does not make a clear, constructive case for his position. He simply assumes that his Christological view in relation to other religions is correct and does not need any defense (1994; 1995b:107-139). Nash thus simply states that “Jesus is the only Savior. There is no other Savior and no other religion, we believe, that can bring human beings to the saving grace of God” (1995b:107).

Like Kraemer, Nash derives his belief in the finality of Jesus Christ from

the statement Jesus claimed for himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6) (Nash 1995b:107). He claims that the uniqueness of Christ is a fundamental element of Christian belief. To call Jesus unique is to declared the "he is the one and only mediator between God and man, the one and only Savior" (Nash 1994:75).

Nash criticizes Hick for relying completely on historical criticism of the New Testament and thus attacking the historical Jesus and making him a mere mythological figure (1994:76-77). Nash (1994:82) argues that British scholar C.F.D. Moule (1977:2-4) has found weaknesses in Hick's view, especially in the claim that neither Jesus nor his early followers regarded him as divine. Moule argues that instead the early Christian recognition of Jesus as divine reflected a pattern that was already there from the beginning. Moule insists that Jesus was someone who could be appropriately described in the very ways he came to be described during the years in which the New Testament was written, that is, as "Lord" and "God."

Nash, unlike Hick and Knitter, takes God the Son title attributed to Jesus Christ in the New Testament literally and metaphysically. On the basis of this, Nash criticizes Hick for ignoring Jesus' own statements about his coming death, as attested to by the Synoptic writers (Matthew. 20:17-19; 26:12f.; Mark 10:33f.; Luke 18:31-34); ignoring Jesus' act of forgiving sins, an act in which Jesus acted as God (Mark 2:8-12). Nash states that when Jesus forgave people, "he went beyond what any mere human is able to do. . . . Jesus acted as though the sins

against other humans were violations of *his* holy law and thus sins against him as well" (1992:150;1994:83). Furthermore, he suggests that even Paul's earliest letters reveal the existence of a high and developed christology. For example, Nash says,

In 2 Corinthians 13:14 Paul affirms Jesus' standing as God (as part of the Trinity). In Philippians 2:5-11 he claims Jesus' equality with God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10 he presents Jesus as God's only medium of deliverance. It is impossible to explain away such statements as late-first century theorizing. (1994:83)¹³

It is very evident that, unlike Hick and Knitter, Nash asserts unequivocally that the incarnate Jesus was God in flesh. The birth of Jesus, he says, "marked the entrance of the eternal and divine Son of God into the human race" (1992:147). The Christian faith is based on the doctrine of the incarnation. If this doctrine is false, the Christian faith is false. He thus claims "Jesus Christ is God—let there be no mistake about this" (1994:85).

If Jesus Christ is God, the logical reasoning, according to Nash, is (1) that God exists; (2) the teachings of Jesus Christ are not mere human speculations, but his words are the Word of God; (3) this means that there really is special revelation which God reveals to human beings in human language; (4) moreover, God's self, person, nature, and character are revealed in a living way (1992:154). In other words, "To know Jesus' teaching is to know God's teaching; to know Jesus' character is to know God's character; to believe in Jesus is to believe in God; to know Jesus is to know God" (Nash 1992:154).¹⁴

It is this high christology in Kraemer and Nash that grounds the finality of

Jesus Christ. Hick and Knitter attack the high christology of the New Testament in order to construct a relativized view of Christ. Kraemer and Nash, on the other hand, affirm the high view of christology presented in the New Testament in order to ground their insistence on the finality of Jesus Christ. They base their christology on the supposition that the historical Jesus really said and did what the New Testament attributes to him. Kraemer states that Christianity is the religion of the incarnation (1938:73). The doctrine of the incarnation, according to Nash, "is one of those beliefs that makes Christianity unique among the religions of the world " (1992:148).

Christ is unique by his revelational character and therefore as such transcends all types of religion. Christ is the final revelation and salvation of God. Consequently, passages such as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 are taken absolutely seriously. Thus both Kraemer and Nash claim there is no salvation available outside of the faith in Jesus Christ.

Soteriological Exclusivity

For Kraemer, Jesus Christ is the decisive and only authentic Word of God which restores the broken relationship and establishes a proper communication between God and human beings (1956:21).

Kraemer notes that the Bible says regarding the redemptive purpose of God that God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:4) (1956:33). What does Kraemer, then, understand by salvation?

Kraemer prefers the German word for salvation (*Heil*) with its connotations of health, wholeness, and well-being, to the English word "salvation" which, he thinks, has become accentuated in the direction of rescue and redemption, and is more restricted in meaning (1956:20; Jathanna 1981:89-90). The term *Heil*, according to Kraemer, presupposes that which is broken and then restored to "wholeness" or to "its original God-willed design" (1956:20). He says,

the meaning of incarnation and reconciliation is not only the salvation of individual men and women but the restoration of the normal, original, divine order of life, in which the worship of God and the joyful doing of God's holy will become the *natural* life. (1938:82)

The coming of Christ in flesh marks this restoration and inaugurates God's work of redemption. The divine history of salvation or divine economy in history, Kraemer believes, has its preparation in God's elected people of Israel, its manifestation in the incarnation of Jesus, and its consummation at Christ's return in glory (1956:381; Jathanna 1981:90).

Kraemer understands salvation as a new status, i.e., a "new reality of the true God-man relationship" (1956:287). Salvation is an objective reality wrought by God (1938:91). It is in no sense a result of human effort, but rests entirely in God's initiative and act. It comes to us through faith (Kraemer 1956:287). It is this theological foundation that offers Kraemer an answer to the root problem as he conceives it: "How can sinful man really walk with God, the Holy and the Righteous, in unbroken and undefiled fellowship?" (1938:75) He provides the soteriological answer in his christology. He finds the decisive act of God in Jesus

Christ through atonement and reconciliation the only reality of redemption, thus making this fellowship possible.

Because of Kraemer's radical christocentric approach, his Christian understanding of salvation is exclusive and different from that of other religions. Kraemer's attitude to other religions is determined by his emphasis on the axiom that salvation is found only through the grace of God revealed in Christ. The incarnate Christ is the center of God's history of salvation (1956:381).

Kraemer views major world religions as religions of self-salvation. With this approach, it is understandable why the logic of incarnation becomes an offense to the people of other faiths. It is because they do not want to accept the fact that God can save them without their help. Comparing the concept of salvation in Christianity and Buddhism, Kraemer says,

In Christianity salvation means being set free from the power, the slavery of sin, from bondage to the powers which rule over us from within; it means also being set free for true service of God from the ungodly powers in the world in order to be set free for the service of God, in bondage to Him. In Buddhism it means finding deliverance from the delusive state of ignorance, that is, ignorance of the non-being and unreality of all that presents itself as 'world', including man himself. (1962:61)

The goal of all religions is not ultimately the same. Comparing Islam and Christianity, Kraemer states that

the place and purport of revelation are one thing for Islam and quite another for Christianity. For Islam the revelation is the book of the revelation, the Koran. . . . In Christianity the revelation is the Person of Jesus Christ. . . . The distinction is a radical one. (1962:61-62)

Comparing the nature and means of salvation in Christianity and

Hinduism Kraemer disagrees with Radhakrishnan's view that there is little serious difference between Hinduism and Christianity on the nature and means of salvation.¹⁵ Kraemer remarks,

This is certainly a mistaken opinion, for Christianity proclaims salvation from sin by forgiveness of sins, which implies a religious world totally different from Hinduism, which preaches salvation from transiency and ignorance. (1938:211)

It is the doctrine of atonement and reconciliation that sets Christian salvation apart from the nature and meaning of salvation in Buddhism and Hinduism. Thus Kraemer says,

in the theocentric religion of Biblical realism salvation has its real meaning in atonement and reconciliation, because in it is expressed the fact that God solely and really creates a way where there is no way. (1938:211)

It is evident from these comparative references that Kraemer acknowledges that Buddhism, Hinduism, and also Islam are certainly "salvation-religions" (1962:61). This does not however mean that the religious end of these religions, including Christianity, is identical. Kraemer believes that salvation in Christianity is exclusively different from these religions precisely because Christian salvation is rooted in the doctrine of atonement and reconciliation. The notion of salvation in Christianity is "not merely radically different, but mutually irreconcilable" (Kraemer 1962:60).

In view of his soteriological exclusivity, unlike Hick and Knitter, Kraemer contends that these religious ends are "not merely various but incompatible, and sometimes even completely alien to one another" (1962:62). The hypothesis of

an identical final goal is precarious. Christian salvation, for Kraemer then, is distinct and unique from that of other religious faiths.

Nash, another exclusivist giving christological base to his soteriological exclusivity, contends that “explicit faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation” (1994:11). This claim, according to Nash, denies that people may be saved without “conscious and explicit faith in Jesus Christ” (1994:11).

Nash believes that soteriological exclusivity is clearly taught in the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts. The New Testament repeatedly declares that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. One of the passages with this message is John 3:16-18. In these verses, Nash says that Jesus himself not only states that those who believe in him have eternal life but also warns that those who do not believe stand condemned (1994:16).

In the book of Acts, Peter proclaims that “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). When the Philippian jailer asks Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved, they reply, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). These words obviously teach Christian exclusivism, says Nash (1994:17).

Nash cites from Paul’s epistles to the Romans to further ground his soteriological exclusivity. Nash says that Paul makes it clear that the one and only ground of human justification before the holy God is the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:10-28; 5:1-11). In Romans 10, Paul explains how sinful

people attain the righteousness that saves: "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised [Jesus] from the dead, you will be saved" (:9).¹⁶ In 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul declares that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Nash believes that the whole New Testament declares that human nature is so sinful that people are utterly hopeless apart from Jesus Christ.¹⁷ That is why, according to him, the New Testament affirms the importance of hearing the gospel and believing. For example, Peter's message at the first Pentecost (Acts 2) and Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew. 28:19-20). It is precisely because of this that Nash regards exclusivism as an essential part of the total Christian message (1994:18). Nash argues,

If Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who became human for the express purpose of dying, and if he died as an atonement for human sin and then rose bodily from the grave, it is difficult to see how anyone can believe it is possible for some people to attain salvation apart from him. (1994:18)

Since hearing of the gospel and believing in it is essential, Nash is of the opinion that "unevangelized mature persons will not only experience God's judgment, but deserve such" (1994:19).¹⁸ Adults need to hear the content of the gospel in order to attain salvation brought by Jesus Christ. Receiving God's salvation does depend completely upon knowing about Jesus and believing in him. Thus Nash believes that conscious knowledge of and explicit faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation.

Nash also argues that human destiny is fixed at the moment of physical

death. That is to say that the attainment of Christian salvation requires that people trust in Christ before death. There is no opportunity to hear the gospel after death. He criticizes inclusivists Pinnock and Sanders for supporting the “post-mortem evangelism” position. In this view everyone who has not had a chance to hear the gospel in this life (before physical death) will be presented with the gospel after death.¹⁹

Both Kraemer and Nash express belief that surrendering to Jesus Christ means in effect making a break with one’s own past, religiously speaking, however impressive that past may be and often is; and the Christian church is in duty bound to require this break, because one must openly and consciously confess Jesus as Lord (Kraemer 1962:99). For Kraemer and Nash, Christ is unique, universal, and final. Salvation is available only in Jesus Christ. There is only one savior not many.

One and not Many: The Exclusivistic Theology of Religions

The exclusivistic theology of religions strongly affirms that Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God, and that salvation is possible only through faith in him. There is no possibility of salvation in any way in other religious traditions.

The exclusivist approach maintains that other religions and cultures are the products of human imagination. The non-Christian religions do not contain the revelation of God. Only Christianity and Christ have the ultimate answer and path to salvation.

The exclusivist position starts from the premise that since we possess the truth, there cannot be any other truth apart from this. Based on this premise that truth is one and not many, and since the Christian revelation is seen to be final and universally valid, all other claims are therefore set aside as false and invalid. It is on this premise that exclusivists emphasize that radical discontinuity between the revelation of God in Jesus Christ through whom salvation has been made available universally, and any other claims to revelation and salvation. Thus they maintain that the Christian message ought to be proclaimed in all its purity, not confused with the voices of other religions (Thomas 1987:49).

A.G. Hogg, an English missionary to India, responded to Kraemer with some penetrating criticism. Hogg's experience with Hindus has caused him to be open to other faiths. He asked with openness: "Can there be within the non-Christian religions, those for whom their religion is a living personal possession, a life hid in God?" (cited in Sharp 1971:206). Hogg was concerned that Kraemer's approach of discontinuity had tended to exclude other religions from any possibility of God's revelation and had suggested that these religions are nothing but the product of human imagination. Contrary to Kraemer's approach to other religions, Hogg asserted that it was "radically wrong for the missionary to approach men of other faiths under the conviction. . . . that he and his follow-believers are witnesses to a divine revelation, while other religions are exclusively the product of a human religious consciousness" (cited in Sharp 1971:209).

True and serious dialogue, with the possibility of finding truth in other religions, has been ruled out at the start by the exclusivist. In fact, it is this form of Christian exclusivism that has carried Christianity to other countries in the last two hundred years of missionary activity. Yet this form of Christianity with desire to convert people to Christ from other religions has usually lost its elasticity. "This produces the irony that the type of Christianity least suited to meet other religions is the type that is most in evidence on all the frontiers where faith meets faiths" (Young 1970:16).

It is possible to show that there is in the theological basis of exclusivism, particularly the theme that God was in Christ, far more flexibility than most evangelicals imagine. It is also possible to show that in contrary to Kraemer and Nash, it is not necessary to have a narrow Christocentric theology to have a basis for the missionary movement.

The exclusivistic model of one and not many is rooted in a christology that holds Jesus Christ is to be the only savior and the absolute revelation of God. The other religious traditions and religious persons, however good they may appear to be, are devoid of God's revelation and grace. The exclusivists, perceiving other religions as devoid of God's universal revelation, minimize importance of the plurality of religions. Their lopsided emphasize on salvation through Christ alone, often at the cost of the axiom of the universal salvific will of God, leaves the exclusivists in either-or category of the Christian theology of religions. The exclusivists fail to reconcile the particular redemptive event of

Jesus Christ with the universal revelation of God.

Inclusivists, taking a middle path, seek to construct a bipolar nature of the Christian theology of religions by attempting to preserve the exclusivistic axiom of the finality of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and the pluralistic axiom of God's universal salvific will, on the other.

¹ This exclusivist stance is adopted by many within the evangelical tradition. There is considerable diversity and debate between exponents sharing this paradigm. See Race (1982:ch.2); Knitter (1985:chs.5 and 6); Okholm and Phillips (1995:chs.3 and 4).

² See Race (1982:11ff.); Knitter (1985:80-96); Braaten (1992:49-63).

³ Barth explains Christianity being one true religion by giving an analogy of the sun: just as the light of the sun falls on one part of the earth and not on another, enlightening one part and leaving the other in darkness, without really changing anything on the earth, so Christ's light falls on the world of religions; it makes one of these religions luminous and true, leaving the rest in darkness and falsehood—but without bringing any essential change to the true religion (1956:353-354). Barth clearly recognizes that the truth of Christianity does not reside in its content or activity as a religion. He admits that the grace of God does bring about certain changes in Christianity. These changes do make it different from other religions. In Christianity "God is really known and worshiped, there is a genuine activity of man as reconciled to God. . . . And it alone has the commission and the authority to be a missionary religion. . . . It is formed and shaped by it [revelation]. It becomes the historical manifestation and means of its revelation" (1956:344,357-58). However, Barth insists that such positive characteristics in Christianity are only "the site and symptoms" of a reality that is constantly beyond it and never identified with it (1956:339). They in no way can be "evidence" for the truth of Christianity or for the truth of any other religion. Kraemer also shares basically the same understanding of Christianity in relation of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

⁴ See D'Costa (1986:58-59) for further explanation.

⁵ See also Race (1982:22-23).

⁶ H.H. Farmer, commenting on Kraemer's Tambaram Book, noted that Kraemer's understanding of revelation primarily in terms of incarnation does not allow him to speak of other religions positively, because we can speak of them positively only in terms of revelation. Farmer (1939:175-76).

⁷ Nash refers to Clark Pinnock and John Sanders as inclusivist

⁸ See also Demarest (1982:246).

⁹ See also Jathanna (1981:71).

¹⁰ Kraemer says in his book, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (1956), "These were, very briefly, the *idees meres* of the exposition of our problem in my book: *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*." p. 237.

¹¹ See especially Kraemer (1956).

¹² Regarding his address at the Allahabad University (India) in 1951 Kraemer writes: "Both lectures resulted in very interesting discussions which strengthened me in my opinion that the Incarnation in Christ, not as a myth but as a historical fact, is one of the most fruitful starting points for challenging 'higher' Hinduism, provided the Incarnation is worked out as God's deepest and most radical expression of His concern about man and the world in all their aspects." Quoted in Jathanna (1981:74).

¹³ See also Moule (1977:6-7); Green (1977: 20).

¹⁴ See also Stott (1957:27).

¹⁵ Dr. Radhakrishnan was a former president of India, and a prominent Hindu philosopher. For his view on salvation in Hinduism and Christianity, see Radhakrishnan (1927).

¹⁶ See Nash (1994:17).

¹⁷ For example, John 1:29; 20:30-31.

¹⁸ Nash says that language here intentionally omits mentally incompetent persons and children who die before reaching a level of maturity that would allow them to grasp the full import of the gospel, including the fact that they are sinners in need of God's forgiveness (1994:19).

¹⁹ Jonh Sanders discusses Pinnock's position in *No Other Name* (1992:261-64). See also the early chapters of Pinnock's book *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (1992).

CHAPTER 5

Ecumenical Inclusivism: A Bipolar Reality

Inclusivistic theologies of religions, both Catholic and evangelical, have sought to address the issue of religious pluralism with an attempt to recognize the importance of other religions and religious persons without minimizing the normativeness of Jesus Christ. Inclusivism in the Christian theology of religions makes an attempt both to accept and to reject the other faiths. Describing the bipolar reality of inclusivism, Race says,

On the one hand it accepts the spiritual power and depth manifest in them [the other faiths], so that they can properly be called a locus of divine presence. On the other hand, it rejects them as not being sufficient for salvation apart from Christ, for Christ alone is Savior. (1982:38)

Inclusivists see their position as a middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism that preserves the important insights of the other two views. Inclusivists agree with pluralists that God's salvation is not restricted to the relatively few people who hear the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ. Inclusivists agree with exclusivists that God's universally accessible salvation is nonetheless grounded in the person of Jesus Christ and his redemptive work.

Gavin D'Costa, an Indian Roman Catholic inclusivist, states that his view "affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God" (1986:80). Pluralist John Hick's description of inclusivism presents it as the belief that "God's forgiveness and acceptance of humanity have been made possible

by Christ's death, but that the benefits of this sacrifice are not confined to those who respond to it with an explicit act of faith" (1984:152).

How far have the inclusivists succeeded in their attempt to bring the universal salvation of God and the finality of Jesus Christ together? How do the universal efficacy of the presence of Christ propounded by Karl Rahner and the universal efficacy of the work of Christ advocated by Clark Pinnock affect the mission of the church today?

There is a continuum of views representing conciliar to evangelical interests in the inclusivistic theology of religions position. Pinnock, influenced by Rahner's theology of religions, makes necessary corrections in order to develop an evangelical theology of religions. Unlike Rahner, Pinnock makes not the presence, but the work of Christ a decisive factor for the universal salvation of God. Does this mean that Pinnock provides a satisfactory paradigm for evangelicals? Or do we still need to construct a more comprehensive paradigm that will keep the universal salvation of God and the finality of Jesus Christ together?

In this chapter I will attempt to show that Rahner and Pinnock, the main advocates of catholic and evangelical forms of an inclusivistic theology of religions, in order to defend the universality of God's salvation, argue for revelational universality, christological inclusivity, and soteriological openness. I will conclude the chapter with a brief evaluation.

Revelational Universality

Paul F. Knitter refers to inclusivism as the *Catholic model* because it was formulated most impressively by the Second Vatican Council (1985:120ff). Catholic theologians have followed this approach since Vatican II, and Alan Race rightly says, “the major architect of the post-conciliar catholic contribution to the subject is undoubtedly Karl Rahner” (1982:45).

The epistemological foundation for Rahner’s inclusivistic theology of religions is part of the fabric of Christian doctrine: God’s desire to save all humankind. Rahner applies a simple logic: if God really has his desire, God will act on it. This means that grace, without which salvation is impossible, must be offered to all. Rahner thus concludes that Christians should “think optimistically” about the universality of revelation and thus the possibilities of salvation outside Christianity, no matter how much error and evil they seem to find in the world. To “think pessimistically” of men/women is to underestimate God’s love and grace (1966:123-124). Even before non-Christians have been affected externally through missionary activity, they have already received something of God’s revelation internally, according to Rahner. He writes,

The proclamation of the Gospel does not simply turn someone absolutely abandoned by God and Christ into a Christian, but turns an anonymous Christian into someone who now also knows about his Christian belief in the depths of his grace-endowed being by objective reflection and in the profession of faith which is given a social form in the Church. (1966:132)

With such an optimistic understanding of the divine salvific will, Rahner affirms the universality of divine revelation, which he calls the “supernatural existential.”

Knitter calls it a Catholic version of the mainline Protestant affirmation of general revelation (1985:125). Rahner explains:

Every man exists not only in an existential situation to which belongs the obligation of striving towards a supernatural goal of direct union with the absolute God in a direct vision, but he exists also in a situation which presents the genuine subjective possibility of reaching this goal by accepting God's self-communication in grace and in glory. Because of God's universal saving purpose, the offer and possibility of salvation extends as far as extends the history of human freedom. . . . Furthermore, this offer of the supernatural reality of the person enabling one to move by one's spiritual and personal dynamism towards the God of the supernatural beatifying life. . . . must be thought of as a change in the structure of human consciousness. . . . The horizon within which the normal, empirically experienced realities of consciousness are grasped, and the ultimate orientation of consciousness are changed by grace. (1966:103; 1989:138-75)

The supernatural existential consists, therefore, "of a transformation of the concrete 'horizon of consciousness' by which, in the present grace-filled order of creation, every person is oriented toward a self-revelation and self-gift of God to be freely and gratefully received" (Dupuis 1997:218).

According to Rahner, grace, offered to all, is given not as an extrinsic addition to human nature. We do not receive grace as if we were putting on a new coat. Rather, grace infuses and becomes part of human nature, that is, part of the psychological structures of human consciousness. This is evident in what we experience ourselves to be--"spirit." In all our human acts of knowing and loving finite objects, we are reaching out to an Infinite that gives these objects their meaning. Grace, then energizes this natural openness and gives it a new dynamism. We receive a "supernatural horizon." Therefore, for Rahner, there is no

such thing as “only nature.” Rahner sees our very “existence” as “supernatural.” This means nature is more than just human nature. This means that there is a “transcendental revelation” built into our very nature. Every time we reach out beyond ourselves to what is true and good, we are experiencing and responding to grace; we are experiencing and truly knowing God even though this knowledge may be “unreflective” or “unthematic,” not yet objectified. Such an encounter with revealing grace can be experienced in a variety of real-life situations. It is contained in our choice to live our lives not only for ourselves but for others. It is implicit in every act of freedom by which we take on responsibility for others, or trust in the face of death or meaninglessness. To know God in these different ways is for Rahner not just revelation. It includes salvation: a communion with the one true God, and experience of purpose, peace, and growth for the individual and society (1969:390-398). Grace built into nature, universal revelation that not only reveals but saves—this is the starting point for Rahner.

Rahner’s case for the salvific value of other religions has been accepted and expanded into a common opinion among Catholic theologians. Walbert Bühlmann and Arnulf Camps develop a more open theology of religions restating Rahner’s basic argument (1983:97-99; 1983:44-48). Bühlmann shows the workings of revealing grace not so much in the psychological structures of the person as in the ongoing process of history and society (1983:202-210). Lonergan recognizes a universalist, saving faith behind the various beliefs of all religions. Lonergan takes the same transcendental, personalist approach as Rahner and

traces the power of grace within the cognitive structures of human nature; our pure, unrestricted desire to know is fulfilled and transformed when, through grace, we find ourselves “loving unrestrictedly” (1972: 101-107, 108-111, 115-119).

Evangelical inclusivism, propounded by Clark Pinnock, though a new proposal in certain ways, has been developed as a “reinterpretation of historic theology” in what he and others hope is a timely and faithful manner. My sense is that Pinnock, in developing evangelical inclusivism, has been greatly and positively influenced by Rahner’s conciliar inclusivism. Pinnock, referring to the Documents of Vatican II, whose great architect was Rahner, acknowledges in his footnotes that “I make no apology as an evangelical in admitting an enormous debt of gratitude to the Council for its guidance on this topic” (1995:97).

Theology has always claimed that God loves the whole world but has found it difficult to speak coherently about it. Western theology has been reluctant to acknowledge that grace operates outside the church, and there is the abhorrent notion of a secret election to salvation of a specific number of sinners, not of people at large. Such beliefs, according to Pinnock, are deep in the Western tradition and place the genuineness of God’s universal salvific will in considerable doubt (1995:97).

This uneasiness regarding certain inherited traditions has pressured Pinnock to develop a different model for handling the doctrine of salvation as it pertains to the multitudes who have lived their lives outside the church and apart from the gospel. This has caused a more positive outlook in Pinnock’s

epistemology in regard to other religions. Pinnock calls his model, “modal inclusivism” (1995:100). The modal inclusivist approach suggests that God might or might not always make positive use of religions in drawing people (Pinnock 1995:100).

According to Pinnock's epistemology, because God is present in the whole world, God's grace is also at work in some way among all people, possibly even in the sphere of religious life (1995:98). This suggests the availability of universal revelation and the possibility that religions may play a role in the salvation of the human race, a role preparatory to the gospel of Christ, in whom alone fullness of salvation is found (1995:98). Pinnock, like Rahner, argues that the Christian truth is that God, the mystery of love, has shown love toward the whole human race, toward those whom we call Hindus, Muslims, and others, who are undeserving sinners like ourselves. If this is the case, then a Christian cannot view any human being regardless of religious background as other than loved by God. Inclusivism thus is a model

which explores the possibility that the Spirit is operative in the sphere of human religion to prepare people for the gospel of Christ. It believes that God, who is gracious and omnipresent, is redemptively at work in the religious dimension of human culture, just as he is in all the other spheres of creation. (Pinnock 1995:96)

The function of the triune God is crucial in Pinnock's epistemology. How is God present and at work in the world? Pinnock explains it through his trinitarian understanding of God.

Our inclusivism is grounded in a relational ontology--in the being of the triune God. When we speak of Father, Son, and Spirit, we confess God's triune identity. This insight into the divine nature,

disclosed in Christian revelation, captures a vivid image of the love of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, and experienced through participation in the Spirit. This ontology points to relationality, liveliness, and openness in the nature of God. (1995:103)

Pinnock's approach appears to exhibit a more realistic attitude toward non-Christian religions than one finds in conciliar inclusivistic approach. Pinnock declares that "it is possible to appreciate positive elements in other faiths, recognizing that God has been at work among them" (1992:97). Since the Spirit gives life to creation, divine grace is also prevenient everywhere (1995:98). This leads Pinnock to observe, "If people in Ghana speak of the transcendent God as the shining one, as unchangeable as a rock, as all-wise and all-loving, how can anyone conclude otherwise than that they intend to acknowledge the true God as we do?" (1992:97) Regarding Buddhism, Pinnock writes, "We must not conclude, just because we know a person to be a Buddhist, that his or her heart is not seeking God" (1992:112). How can one fail to appreciate the noble aspects of the Buddha, whose ethical direction, compassion, and concern for others is so moving that it appears God is at work in his life? Pinnock says that "Gautama resembles the sort of 'righteous man' whom Jesus told his disciples to receive (Mt 10:41)" (1992:100).

Pinnock draws attention to the theistic Saiva Siddhanta literature of Hinduism which celebrates a personal God of love. He writes, "It expresses the belief that all God's actions in the world are intended to express love for his creatures and to lead them into loving union with himself" (1992:100). With regard to Japanese religion he asks what else we can make of the emphasis on grace

and faith in the Japanese Shin-Shu Amida sect (1992:100). With regard to Islam he asks, who can deny the striking similarities between the prophet Muhammad and the Old Testament prophets? "Would not admitting this have momentous consequences for our witness to Islam?" (1992:100). Through these parallels Pinnock shows that other religions also announce the grace and love of God. And when they do, "this Christian, at least, rejoices" (1992:101).

Pinnock believes that revelation is universal because the Spirit is everywhere at work. He thus refuses to allow any kind of disjunction between "nature and grace or between common and saving grace" (1995:98). Grace, therefore, seen from the perspective of revelational universality, is not only operative but also encountered in other religious traditions as well. Pinnock admits that "non-Christian religions may be not only the means of a natural knowledge of God, but also the locale of God's grace given to the world because of Christ" (1995:98).

Both Rahner and Pinnock see revelation as universal and thus hold that grace is operative outside the church and may be encountered and mediated in the context of other religions. This they affirm because they see in other religions the operative presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ which remains unknown to their members.

Christological Anonymity

It is the unknown operative presence of the mystery of Christ in other religions that Rahner has designated by the term "anonymous Christianity."¹

The expression, anonymous Christianity, bears direct reference to the cosmic presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ. Anonymous Christianity means that

salvation in Jesus Christ is available to human persons, in whatever historical situation they may find themselves, inasmuch as in a hidden way they open themselves to God's self-communication which culminates in the Christ-event. (Dupuis 1997:146-47)

Rahner's conciliar inclusivism is based on two theological axioms: first, God has fully and finally revealed Godself in Christ; second, the salvific efficacy is extended to other religions as well.

For Rahner, the affirmation of the finality of Jesus Christ does not limit salvation to those who have responded to the revelation in Christ. What it affirms is that "salvation, wherever it may be said to be present, is always of Christ, for Christ alone is Savior" (Race 1982:45). This is an inclusive understanding of the place of other religious traditions in the activity of God's salvific purposes for the world through Jesus Christ.

Rahner clearly states that a non-Christian religion does not merely contain elements of natural knowledge of God; it contains also supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given on account of Christ. For this reason he says a non-Christian religion can be recognized as a lawful religion (Rahner 1966:121). The grace of God through Christ is anonymously present in other religious traditions and operative in their rites and ceremonies for salvation (Race 1982:47).

In a specific study of the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity, an Indian theologian, Raimundo Panikkar, born in Barcelona, in his book The Unknown Christ of Hinduism (1977), has expressed this theory of anonymous Christianity in the following way:

The good and *bona fide* Hindu is saved by Christ and not by Hinduism, but it is through the Sacraments of Hinduism, through the *Mysterion* that comes to him through Hinduism, that *Christ* saves the Hindu normally. (1977:54)²

Panikkar, like Rahner, maintains the centrality of Christ to the extent that even Hindus are saved not through their efforts but through Christ because Christ is present anonymously in their efforts to reach God. This centrality of Christ is inclusive in nature because Christ is present not only in Christianity but in Hinduism as well, not as known, but as "unknown Christ."

Rahner states that whatever saving grace is present in the world has been constituted and caused by the event of Jesus Christ. Rahner, however, does not consider Christ an *efficient* cause of grace (Knitter 1985:128), as if Jesus had to do something to bring about God's universal love. Rather, Christ is the *final* cause of God's universal salvific will (1985:128), what God, from the beginning of time, had in mind in calling and offering grace to all humankind. Jesus Christ, then, is the final goal of the entire process of universal revelation and grace. For Rahner, that final goal is a necessary cause of salvation.

God desires the salvation of everyone; and this salvation is the salvation won by Christ This relationship of God to man . . . rests on the Incarnation, death, and the resurrection of the one Word of God become flesh. (1966:118,122)

Christ is the “final, unsurpassable, irreversible” historical realization and manifestation of what God is doing in history. He is the “absolute perfection and guarantee” of God’s love and grace, “the greatest support and source of confidence” for committing oneself to God. In other words, Jesus Christ, as the final cause of salvation, tells humanity what it is, where it is going, what it can hope to achieve (Rahner 1974:178-202, 318).

The second theological axiom states that other religions must not simply be regarded as illegitimate from the very start, but must be seen as quite capable of having positive significance. He contends that non-Christian religions can be considered *lawful*, that they contain “supernatural grace-filled elements.” By lawful religion Rahner means one which can be counted as having positive significance as a means for achieving salvation and a right relationship with God (1966:121, 125; Race 1982:46). He is aware that the criticism of error and corruption in religion could be an argument and so is careful to qualify the usage of the term--“lawful religions.”

In order to justify the usage of the term, lawful religions, Rahner responds with an appeal to the Old Testament. He points out that even the religion of Israel was only a lawful religion. It could not be considered perfect, even though it is accepted to be the vehicle for God’s grace. In other words, it was meant to be only for the Israelites and for no one else.

Rahner’s main argument is that Christ was present in the world even before the incarnation. The view of *Cosmic Christ* presented by Rahner seeks to answer

the questions raised against the exclusivist for maintaining discontinuity between Christian faith and non-Christian faith and for making other religions non-revelatory. In answering these questions, Rahner has shaken the very foundation of christology by separating the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. Jesus the historical figure was God incarnate, God in flesh (John 1:1-3; 1:14). By making Christ cosmically present in other religions, he makes other religions the valid vehicles of salvation. If Christ is saving people in their own religion and they do not know about this, then the end of Christian mission is not conversion to Christ but self-awakening to Christ. This means Hindus continue to worship their different gods and goddesses without knowing that they are worshipping Christ. The cosmic Christ is present in other religions regardless of whether the followers of their respective religions know him.

Although his theological axioms may appear to undermine the persuasive nature of Christian mission, Rahner insists that the need to preach the gospel is as urgent as ever before. He feels that a more theologically correct motivation for missionaries is to help others to become more fully aware of, and thus more committed to, what they already are: children of the one God.

Similarly, Pinnock's inclusivist theory is also influenced by two theological axioms: (1) the particularity axiom, and (2) the universality axiom (1992:49).

The particularity axiom focuses on Jesus Christ as the only mediator of salvation. Clark Pinnock affirms the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ and regards as heretical any attempt to reduce or water down this conviction

(1988:153). According to Pinnock, the central Christian conviction about the lordship of Christ “is nonnegotiable for Christians and has to be seen as a basic rule of Christian speech” (1988:155). Christians cannot possibly regard the lordship of Christ “as a bargaining chip in an interreligious dialogue” (1988:155). Pinnock states,

Christians ought to confess that Jesus was and is the unique vehicle and means of God’s saving love in the world, and its definitive Savior--All religions make absolute claims at some point, and Christians ought to make them in the matter of the finality of Jesus Christ. (1988:155)

This belief about the finality of Jesus must not be compromised, Pinnock insists.

The universality axiom suggests that God intends his salvation to be available to all humans (1 Timothy 2:4; Titus 2:11). God wills the salvation of every human being and gives every human a chance to accept his grace. The universalist axiom entails that “there is a wonderful broadness in the apparent narrowness of the Christian confession” (1988:157).

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is derived from Israel's God and is also seen in Jesus' claims and his audience's responses to him. "It is propositionally the case that Jesus is definitely and unsurpassably the Lord of the universe" (1992:63).

The universality axiom expresses the belief that God must make salvation available to all human beings, including everyone who lived before Christ outside the sphere of Jewish influence and everyone since Christ who has lived without hearing about the gospel. This emphasis is then focused in the particularity

axiom on the one and only mediator whose person and redemptive work is the ground for salvation. He maintains the evangelical conviction that God in Christ redeemed the world, yet he differs from the exclusivist or restrictivist view that salvation is restricted to those who have heard and responded specifically to the gospel of Jesus Christ. His theological premise is that the work of Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation but not epistemologically necessary. That is to say, whoever is saved whether in Hinduism, Islam or Christianity is saved through the redemptive work of Christ. However, one does not necessarily need to possess the knowledge of Christ in order to be saved. The work of Christ, not the knowledge of Christ, is necessary for salvation.

Pinnock says that the claims concerning Jesus Christ do require some explanation in the present religiously pluralistic context. He asks: "Does the high Christology in the church's confession of faith permit openness to other faiths, or does it require harsh, restrictive response?" (1992:51). His response is that a biblically based christology does not entail a narrowness of outlook toward the people of other religions, if one learns to think in a trinitarian manner about these issues (1992:51).

Pinnock believes that the church's confession about Jesus in the first century is compatible with "an open spirit, with an optimism of salvation, and with a wider hope" (1992:74). He states:

According to the New Testament, the work of redemption, which spans all ages and continents and comes to fullest expression at a particular point in history, also issues out again into universality. (Pinnock 1992:74)

Pinnock is saying in accordance with the Second Vatican Council that God's grace is global and thus the reality of the incarnate Christ complements and does not cancel that fact.³ There is no other salvation than what God has given through Jesus Christ. But at the same time he views God's grace as operative in other religious traditions.

Pinnock speaks of the Spirit as graciously present even in non-Christian religious contexts. "I believe that the Spirit is present in advance of missions, preparing the way of the Lord" (1995:100). Pinnock is optimistic about the Spirit's work in other religions; however, unlike Rahner, he does not suggest that other religions are capable of mediating salvation. One can encounter grace in other religions, but they are not the vehicles of salvation. In the same vein he does not hesitate to say that one may be outside the church, but one can never be outside God's grace (1992:75).

Pinnock distinguishes the ontological necessity of Christ's work of redemption from the epistemological situation of sinners.

There is no salvation except through Christ but it is not necessary for everybody to possess a conscious knowledge of Christ in order to benefit from redemption through him. The patriarch Job, for example, was saved by Christ (ontologically) without actually knowing the name of Jesus (epistemologically). (Pinnock 1992:75)

This universal view of salvation appeals because of its honest willingness to acknowledge sanctity in persons and religions other than Christians. We have encountered saintly persons of other faiths (1995:101).

Pinnock asks, "If it is absolutely necessary to call on the name of Jesus to be saved, then how was Job saved? how was Abraham saved, how are the babies dying in infancy saved? If any of these are saved (and the objectors grant that they all are), then according to their view it is not absolutely necessary to hear the gospel and believe on Jesus for salvation" (1992:177).

In this connection, Pinnock makes use of the logos christology, and thus argues that the Logos, which was made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, is present in the entire world and in the whole of human history.

Though Jesus Christ is Lord, we confess at the same time that the Logos is not confined to one segment of human history or one piece of world geography. The second Person of the Trinity was incarnate in Jesus, but not totally limited to Palestine. (1992:77)

Pinnock insists that God as defined by Christ does not mean that "God is exhausted by Christ or totally confined to Christ" (1992:77). That is to say that the Logos has already been active in the places where the knowledge of the incarnate Jesus has not yet reached. God the Logos has more going on by way of redemption than what happened in first-century Palestine (Pinnock 1992:77). Recognizing the work of the cosmic Christ in the religions of the world, according to Pinnock, is the way to confess the incarnation without it being a hindrance to openness (1992:77).

Pinnock is open to see God at work in non-Christian persons and religions but he tends not to glorify religions, since there are depths of darkness, deception, and bondage in them. He avoids being rosy-eyed about religions that can be

wicked as well as noble (1995:99). Rahner, on the other hand, is very positive about other faiths and considers them to possess a salvific quality.

Pinnock's position is a classic example of an evangelical inclusivist position which is different from Rahner's conciliar inclusivist position. Pinnock while arguing for a high christology, makes salvation available to other religious *persons* without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but not necessarily through their religious traditions. Rahner, on the other hand, argues that salvation is only through Jesus Christ, but considers even non-Christian *religions* vehicles of salvation. However, both Rahner and Pinnock, while contending for the existence of anonymous Christians and holy pagans in other religions, acknowledge the anonymity of Christ. In other words, Christ is anonymous to anonymous Christians and righteous pagans.

Part of inclusivism's appeal is its response to the problem of dealing with the millions of people who die without ever hearing the gospel of Christ. Inclusivists insist that all people must have a chance to be saved. There is an openness in their soteriology.

Soteriological Openness

Rahner's hermeneutical method can be termed the *hermeneutic of anonymous Christianity*. This method is developed by Rahner to broaden and engender more optimistic Christian attitudes toward other believers. In showing that other believers can be called "Christians without a name," Rahner tries to break through Christian exclusivism.

He attempts to make Christians consciously aware that the grace of Christ cannot be confined--"that God is greater than human nature and the church." Further, to call believers in other religions anonymous Christians disposes Christians to approach them with the realization that, most likely, they are not simply "pagans," total strangers, and that the gospel does not necessarily bring them anything fundamentally new or "absolutely unknown." As anonymous Christians, "pagans" already know the one God of love who is active in their midst, already bringing about the kingdom. Rahner feels that his hermeneutical method, therefore, promotes a more open, authentic dialogue with other religions (1966:131-134).

Anonymous Christianity, Rahner explains, is lived out by the members of other religions in the sincere practice of their own religions. Christian salvation reaches them anonymously through their religious traditions. This affirmation is based on the social character of a person's religious life, inseparable from the religious tradition and community in which it is lived (1966:128-129; Dupuis 1997:145).

John B. Cobb, Jr., sums up the heart of Rahner's hermeneutic. According to Cobb, Rahner is saying

God works salvifically everywhere. People can be saved whether or not they are related to the Catholic church or consciously accept Jesus Christ. People saved in this way he calls anonymous Christians. The religions of the world are used by God in this salvific work. Thus they are positive vehicles of salvation. But they are not on a par with the Christian church. Once the Christian church is fully established in a community there is no longer any need for other religions there. Their function in the history of salvation is superseded by that of the Christian church. (1984:165)

Rahner believed that the non-Christian religions contain “supernatural grace-filled elements” and that God’s offer of grace is mediated through them (1966:121). By this he means that the non-Christian religions can be “a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God’s plan of salvation” (1966:121, 125). Rahner thus concludes: “Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian” (1966:131).

This argument suggests that the seekers in other religions have all along been Christians. This inference is built on the fact of the universal availability of God’s revelation and grace. “For this grace, understood as the *a priori* horizon of all his spiritual acts, accompanies his consciousness subjectively, even though it is not known objectively” (Rahner 1980:75). It is through this grace that there are those, Rahner claims, who are already on their way to salvation even though outside of Christ. However, this salvation is Christ’s, since there is no other name through which salvation is given.

The question has been raised: If salvation is through Christ alone, then what about those who have no opportunity to hear the message of the gospel? Or even, what about those who lived before Jesus Christ? Is God so partial that only a small minority of all those who lived, i.e., those who will get an opportunity to hear of Christ’s offer of salvation, will be saved? Rahner’s response is that if

persons live outside of the influence of Christianity it is not to be taken for granted that they are outside the scope of salvation. God is responsible for them living where they are and therefore makes provision. God's grace is available to everyone regardless of religious or social background. "It would be wrong to regard the pagan as someone who has not yet been touched in any way by God's grace" (Rahner 1980:75). God has already demonstrated God's grace to them.

The anonymous Christian is a Christian unawares. The difference between such a one and the explicit Christian is partly one of subjective awareness of being Christian (Dupuis 1997:146). There is an implicit Christianity and there is an explicit Christianity. Both are "Christian," despite the gap that keeps them apart (Dupuis 1997:147).

The question is what occurs when an anonymous Christian is confronted with the message of Christ and embraces it in faith? Rahner answers:

The revelation which comes to him from without is not in such a case the proclamation of something as yet absolutely unknown. . . . [It is] the expression in objective concepts of something which this person has already attained or could already have attained in the depth of his rational existence. . . . In the last analysis, the proclamation of the Gospel does not simply turn someone absolutely abandoned by God and Christ into a Christian, but turns an anonymous Christian into someone who now also knows about his Christian belief in the depths of his grace-endowed being by objective reflection and in the profession of faith which is given a social form in the church. (1966:131-32)

What occurs in the transformation of non-Christians described by Rahner is quite unlike the evangelical understanding of conversion. Gavin D'Costa explains,

"It is not simply a matter of making explicit what was only implicit before, but being transformed, moulded and nourished by the social and historical particulars of the liturgy, worship, and sacramental structures of the Church" (1986:88).

Rahner denied that his inclusivism compromises the Christian church's historical understanding of itself "as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any religion besides itself as of equal right" (1966:118). At the same time, he refuses to deny the lawful character of non-Christian religions that can be and, indeed, are used by God in preparing anonymous Christians for God's grace. The errors of the religions are still there, but God mediates God's offer of grace through these non-Christian faiths. Yet Rahner failed to suggest the specific ways as to how this divine mediation of grace actually happens.

The premise with which Rahner is working is that God wants all people to be saved. If this is true then it should follow that God should make some provision. Therefore, if God has a salvific design for all people, "the individual ought to and must have the possibility in his life of partaking in a genuine saving relationship to God" (Rahner 1980:70).

For Rahner, people have always had a positive, saving relationship with God "within that religion which in practice was at [their] disposal by being a factor in [their] sphere of existence" (1980:71). In other words, the social nature of all religion provides that all persons live within the religion their society offers them. He therefore concludes:

And since it does not at all belong to the notion of a lawful religion intended by God for man as something positively salvific that it should be pure and positively willed by God in all its elements, such

a religion can be called an absolute legitimate religion for the person concerned. (1980:71-72)

God intended this salvation for people in accordance with God's will in the concrete religion of their actual realm of existence and historical condition (Rahner 1980:72). This sociological link, characteristic of Vatican's theology of religions, is Rahner's chief basis for his argument for soteriological openness extended to other religions.⁴

Similarly, other Catholic theologians also follow Rahner's approach of soteriological openness to other religions. H.R. Schlette affirms that "it is God's will that the religions should be ways of salvation, independent of the special way of salvation of Israel and the Church." With Hans Küng he goes on to describe the world religions as the *ordinary*, the common, way to salvation, whereas Christianity makes up the *extraordinary*, the special way (Schlette 1965:80-81; Küng 1967:51-53). Küng proposes the same universalist starting point for a theology of religions when he urges Christians to abandon their ecclesiocentrism and to take on a more theocentric approach to other faiths. Such an approach recognizes the mysterious activity of God, not the church, within the world outside Christianity (1967:37-47).

Pinnock's inclusivistic christology finds an *optimism of salvation* in the gracious universal love of God. This optimism is set over and against the *fewness* doctrine of restrictivists (exclusivists) who hold that only a few will be saved.

Pinnock's hermeneutical method can be termed a *hermeneutic of hopefulness*. His hermeneutic of hopefulness is derived from the universal

orientation of the early chapters of Genesis. The "global covenants" with Noah and Abraham and the presence of Melchizedek and Abimelech as "pagan saints" prove that God works outside so-called salvation history (1992: 26, 27). He says, "From the earliest chapters of the Bible we learn a fundamental (if neglected) truth, that salvation history is coextensive with world history and its goal is the healing of all the nations" (1992:23).

How then does Pinnock relate his christology to an *optimistic* view of salvation? He argues that responding to *premessianic revelation* can make the non-Christian right with God. "There is no salvation except through Christ but it is not necessary for everyone to possess a conscious knowledge of Christ in order to benefit from redemption through him" (1992:75).

Pinnock acknowledges the goodness and uprightness found in other religious persons without making them anonymous Christians. However, he speaks of "holy pagans." Pinnock's hermeneutic of hopefulness is open to the idea that God ultimately accepts a variety of people in Christ without their ever having heard of, or responded to, Christ himself. Old Testament saints, therefore, join with infants, "holy pagans," and others in the happy category of "the saved."

Pinnock seeks to distance himself from what he regards as the "rosy-eyed optimism" that has "tended to lead Roman Catholic scholars down the path toward relativism" (Pinnock 1990:368). Pinnock describes himself as wanting "to be more realistic about the good and evil in religions and not be naive when it comes to

building bridges and engaging in dialogue" (1990:368). He also objects to Rahner's notion of anonymous Christians as going much too far "in the direction of sanctifying non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation in the lives of those who call out to God from within paganism" (1988:164). In Pinnock's view, Rahner writes as if being a Buddhist is perfectly all right. We must not say anything, Pinnock contends, that would create the impression that some people do not need to repent and believe the gospel.

Pinnock asks, would God accept people whose beliefs fall far short of the complete truth? His answer is affirmative. This affirmation is derived from the merciful God who

permitted the nations to worship him in ways not proper for Israel to do (Deuteronomy 4:19). God allowed Namman the Syrian leper, after his healing, to worship in Rimmon's temple because of the delicate circumstances he was in (2 Kings 5:18). . . . Should we not rather be thankful for the wideness of his mercy, for his not expecting the same thing from everyone, and for his accepting conceptual shortcomings in theology? (1992:101)

Pinnock, however, affirms that nothing that has been said about other religions denies the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ. He writes: "Jesus *is* the only way to God the Father, to God who is boundless love. His is a unique disclosure without any rival at all. But this does not deny the reality of the knowledge of God that people possessed before Jesus came, or of that knowledge they possess today where he has not yet been named" (1992:101).

In this connection, Pinnock interprets Acts 4:12, a text used to support the exclusive approach to other religions, from the perspective of premessianic

revelation. Pinnock says that of course there is no other name given to us by which to be saved, but Peter does not deny “premessianic revelation and salvation.” Peter is saying that “there is nothing comparable to the blessings of the messianic age which have been poured out on us in these last days” (1992:101). He goes on to say that certainly Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by him (John 14:6). But in saying this, Pinnock comments, “He [Peter] is not denying God at work in the wider world beyond Palestine and before his own time” (1992:79).

Pinnock argues that a believer like Job or Melchizedek in the non-Christian world does not need deliverance from eschatological wrath but rather access to the fuller expression of God’s grace and power, which is in Jesus (1992:179). The Old Testament saints and the saints in other religions are called by Pinnock *premessianic believers* who had or have *premessianic revelation* (1992:179). He, however, argues that the fact that persons can give themselves to God on the basis of premessianic revelation does not excuse us from communicating the gospel to them. “Unevangelized believers need a clearer revelation of God’s love and forgiveness, and the assurance that goes with love and forgiveness. The fact that people can respond to cosmic revelation does not mean the word about Jesus need not be proclaimed to them. They need to hear it by way of fulfillment and assurance” (1992:179).

Since there are some who have responded positively to the light they have received, the motivation for preaching the good news to them is that they might

learn more about the source of that light, have a fuller experience of salvation in the dimension of Pentecost, and be caught up in the kingdom surge (Pinnock 1992:178). Such people are waiting for this message to arrive. God has already spoken to them, and they are eager to hear and receive this good news. What a pleasure it will be to meet them, to learn their names, to hear how God has dealt with them, and to share how good God has been to us (Pinnock 1992:179).

Premessianic believers, along with many others, need to be challenged to seek God because they have not yet done so. For them the gospel comes as a stimulus to wake from sleep. God's word has gone out in all the world in general revelation, but it is not the same as the light which shines from the face of Jesus Christ. No one at all, whatever his or her spiritual condition, should be denied access to that light (Pinnock 1992:179-80).

This relieves us, according to Pinnock, from presenting a God who has restricted grace only to his favorites. God has no favorites (Acts 10:34f). It is difficult to believe that the large number of people are beyond the possibility of salvation through no fault of their own (1995:101).

The inclusivist model recognizes both revelation and salvation outside Christianity. It admits that Christ need not be considered the sole vehicle of God's saving love in the world. It continues to affirm, however, that Christ must be proclaimed as the fullest revelation, the definitive Savior, the norm above all other norms for all religions.

One in Many: Inclusivistic Theology of Religions

We started this chapter with the proposal of inclusivists that seeks to keep alive a bipolar reality. That is, to maintain the importance of both other religions and the normative nature of Jesus as God's only way of salvation. However, in explaining their position, we discover that their theology of religions, especially that of Karl Rahner, could perhaps better be termed not a bipolar reality, but *one* Christ in *many* faiths. That is, anonymous Christians in many faiths are believers in the one known to his followers in the Christian religion as Jesus Christ.

The term *anonymous Christian* has now become part of our contemporary theological vocabulary. Pluralist John Hick dismisses the inclusivist's position stating that it is "an attempt to accommodate growing knowledge of other faiths by drawing a more complicated, but still thoroughly Christianity-centered map" (Cited in Barnes 1989:73). While pluralists dismiss inclusivists' work as an offensive Christian paternalism that fails to give enough credit to non-Christian religions, conservatives fault inclusivists for giving other religions too much credit. If the inclusivists, says Nash, were close to being right, it ought to be possible to see large numbers of "righteous" non-Christians moving toward Christian church. This is hardly what we do in fact observe (1994:112). Nash further says that the inclusivists' position affects the place of Christian missions and the role of the Christian church. Their view lacks incentive for preaching about Jesus Christ; Christian discipleship loses its distinctive character; the cross of Christ loses its centrality (1994:112).

In fact, by calling the people of different faiths anonymous Christians, the inclusivists are prejudging the people of other faiths. Describing the people of other religions as anonymous Christians means that their religion and faith are not taken seriously. "The devout adherent of another religion will rightly say that to call him an anonymous Christian is to fail to take his faith seriously" (Newbigin, 1981:8). By calling the people of other religions *anonymous Christians*, conciliar inclusivism, in fact, makes Christianity imperialistic. Christian religion then becomes absolute and final; Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam do not matter because the people of these religions are called anonymous Christians. There is nothing to learn from other religions, no need for mutual dialogue and enrichment.

Ken Gnanakan, an Indian theologian, criticizes Rahner for placing all religions on equal ground. Gnanakan says that though the religion of Israel was imperfect yet it was God's vehicle.

It is through that vehicle that salvation was promised and is now actualized in Jesus Christ. To place all religions on the same plane as the religion of Israel is to ignore a historical reality that is central to the redemptive revelation of God for the whole world. (1992:76)

Rahner, who is very positive toward other faiths, considers them to possess a salvific status. Other religions for him are "lawful" because they are capable of mediating grace. He goes beyond the affirmation that grace may be encountered in the context of other religions. There is a subtle difference between *encountering grace* and *mediating grace*. Pinnock leans more toward encountering grace than mediating grace in the context of other religions.

There is a difference between religious truth presented as *universally* relevant and truth presented as *definitively* and *normatively* relevant. The representatives of inclusivism, while making salvation universally accessible even without the knowledge of Christ, still adhere to Christ as the full and final expression of divine revelation and cause of salvation, “the norm above all other norms” (Knitter 1985:142). Salvation may be available universally to sincere adherents of other religious traditions even without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ is definitively and normatively the source of that salvation. Inclusivists differ from pluralists, who teach that non-Christian religions offer genuine salvation. If the people of other religions are saved, inclusivists insist, they can only be saved on the basis of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the only Savior. In other words, many paths treaded along in different religions ultimately find convergence in one Savior Jesus Christ.

Inclusivistic theology of religions finds a middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism that seeks to preserve both the particularity of Christ and God’s universal salvation. In an attempt to hold the two important facets together, both Rahner and Pinnock, instead of retaining, resolve the tension that exists between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions. They resolve it by suggesting that many religious paths that persons of other religious traditions take, will ultimately find their convergence in the one and only Savior Jesus Christ. Or, they resolve it by contending that many anonymous christians or holy pagans in different religious traditions are being saved by the one and

only Savior Jesus Christ. The one anonymous Christ is present and operative in many religious traditions.

We laid out in Chapter two the long-standing historical tendency of the church to arrive at both-and solutions to christological, theological, and ecclesiological issues. The church has characteristically preserved the dialectical tension between divine and human in the Chalcedonian definition of Christ, between transcendence and immanence in understanding God in the Enlightenment period, and between proclamation and social action as the essential function of the church in the Modern period. In contrast with this record, the inclusivistic model of one in many resolves the dialectical tension between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions, and thus does not fall fully into the both-and nature of the Christian theology of religions.

¹ This theme is treated by Rahner in several essays contained in *Theological Investigations*, 23 vols. For studies of Rahner's thought on this point, see D'Costa (1986:80-116).

² It should be noted here that Panikkar, in the completely revised and enlarged edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1981), has revised his notion of the normativity of Christianity and Jesus. He now rejects all models of encounter between Christianity and other religions that presume the superiority or fulfillment of other religions in Christianity. With Rahner, he affirms that the Logos or Christ, eternal and universal, has been incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. However he parts company with Rahner in refusing to maintain that such an incarnation has taken place, solely, finally, definitively, normatively, in Jesus. See also Knitter (1985:152-57).

³ See Ruokanen (1990:56-61) for the Vatican Council's teaching on this issue.

⁴ See Gnanakan (1992:76-77) for further explanation.

CHAPTER 6

Christian Theology of Religions: A Dialectical Reality

In an attempt to reconcile the universality of God's salvation and the particularity of Christ we saw in the previous chapter some efforts by inclusivists and noted the problems that emerge. The New Testament talks about God's ultimate desire that all must be saved, and yet teaches that only those who believe in Jesus Christ will be saved. In the recent interreligious dialogue between Christianity and the world religions the question has often been raised whether Christians can and must recognize that there are, besides Jesus Christ, other saviors, such as Gautama, Krishna, and Muhammad, who may be equal or even superior to Jesus. Is Jesus so unique among the religious figures of history as to rule out any other possible mediator of salvation? Can and should Christians continue to affirm that Jesus Christ is normative for all people in their relationship with God, that is, "ultimately decisive, definitive, archetypal for humanity's relation with God?" (Küng 1976:123).

This tension is evident and it is in the resolving of this tension that we find the varying answers. The exclusivists affirm that Jesus Christ is God's true revelation and salvation is found only in him. The inclusivists affirm the uniqueness of Jesus without denying that God's saving presence may also be mediated through other religions. They, however, insist that Christ includes other religions either by being present in them anonymously or by fulfilling them. Jesus remains the norm for all religious experience. The pluralists affirm that

Jesus is unique, but his uniqueness includes and is included by other potentially equal religious figures. They view Jesus as neither constitutive of nor normative for authentic religious experience, but as *theocentric*, that is, as a *universally relevant* manifestation of God's revelation and salvation in history Jesus may have universal relevance but not uniqueness (Knitter 1985:75-96; 97-144; 145-231; Phan 1990:163-64).

The openness of the Christian faith in the encounter with other religious traditions is at stake here. The model of dialectical tension we discussed in Chapter two proved to be a viable model for theologizing in response to such historical challenges as the nature of Christ, God, and the church. Accordingly we contend that, on the basis of historical reality, this same model of dialectical tension will provide a viable alternative for affirming the particularity of Jesus Christ without minimizing the significance of the plurality of religions.

The model is not dialectical in the Hegelian sense of producing a progression of compromises by the coming together of opposites. As a creative dialectical model, it involves a dialogical way of understanding truth. Its understanding of the truth is more relational, conversational, and dialogical. Because this model does not allow classical formulations of faith to be compromised or sold-out, it can help achieve the twin goals of authenticity in the Christian tradition and respectability in the circle of non-Christian religions.

There is obviously a dilemma that faces any theologian who wants to be both committed and yet open at the same time. This dilemma was well

expressed in an article by Kenneth Cragg in which he asked the question: "Is the church in the world among the religions. . . . either forfeiting truth to enable openness, or foregoing openness, and so making a criminal privacy of truth?" (1964:305)

In the Chapters three, four, and five I have demonstrated that the view of revelation affects the view of Christ and then the view of salvation. These three components are of paramount importance for understanding and constructing a Christian theology of religions. In this chapter I will attempt to construct a dialectical Christian theology of religions in view of revelational plurality, christological particularity, and soteriological experientiality.¹ The chapter will conclude that a dialectical Christian theology of religions seeks to hold both one and many together in dialectical tension. Let me begin the conclusion with an introduction.

The Particularity of Christ and the Plurality of Religions

The question of uniqueness is also raised of Christianity as a religion. Is Christianity as a historical religion the only true religion? For exclusivists, Christianity is the one and only true religion founded by Jesus himself. Other religions are human attempts at self-salvation deformed by errors and superstitions. Inclusivists contend that, while other religions may be ways of salvation, Christianity is the best religion, divinely authenticated as the surest means of access to God and intended to absorb and fulfill other religions. Pluralists view Christianity as one of the many religions, all equally valid and

mutually complementary.² Hick and Knitter, in order to overcome a negative aspect of Christian exclusivism, contend that to be truly theocentric in an age of religious pluralism is to give up all the exclusive claims of Christology and all references to Christ as the one and only way to experience God's revelation and salvation.

Interestingly, many early church Fathers perceived other faiths positively. The *Logos* was seen as active in Judaism and other cultures prior to the incarnate Christ. The early church Fathers discern some form of God's manifestation in other religions. Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) wrote: "We have been taught that Christ was the First begotten of God that. . . .He is the Word of whom all mankind partakes. Those who lived by reason are Christians, even if they have been considered atheists: such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclites and others like them" (Martyr 1948:83). Justin recognized a genuine, if limited, knowledge of the divine *Logos*.

Justin believed that all people participate in the eternal divine *Logos*. And he identified Christ with the divine *Logos*. Thus Race observes, "The identification of Jesus with the *Logos* was the key shift which enabled Justin to include the religious life of mankind within the Christian dispensation" (1982:43). The implication of the identification of Jesus with the *Logos* is that whatever truth and goodness may be encountered in other religious faiths are partial and incomplete compared with the fullness of truth and goodness which has been revealed in Jesus Christ (Race 1982:43).

It is noteworthy to observe here that the partial revelation granted to other faiths and the presence of the Spirit of God to teach or prepare other faiths to receive the gospel are paralleled in the Vatican II documents. The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) states:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. (Flannery 1975:739)

However, the Vatican II documents, while affirming the positive significance of other religions, stressed the uniqueness of Christ as universal savior. The above passage which acknowledges the true and holy in other faiths continues: "Yet she proclaims, is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18f.), men find the fullness of their religious life" (Flannery 1975:739).

Religion by itself is not merely human or demonic. People need God and they find this desire fulfilled in religion. Not all that is in religion is demonically influenced. People, regardless of their religious background, with all sincerity seek God.

Chris Wright, an English Old Testament scholar, highlights this fact, referring to Johannes Blauw's statement: "A man without religion is a contradiction in itself" (cited in Wright 1990:89). Blauw considers human beings to be "incurably religious" because their relationship with God belongs to "the

very essence.” Blauw goes on to state the human religious predicament that we “simultaneously seek after God our Maker and flee from God our judge. Human religions, therefore, simultaneously manifest both these human tendencies” (cited in Wright 1990:89).

Thus it is safe to say that this tension of opposites in every religion shows, on the one hand, that people do authentically seek after God and that the respective religions create a climate for their believers to carry out that pursuit. Yet, on the other hand, people in every religion live in a state of rebellion and disobedience to their knowledge of God.

Being created in the image of God in itself presupposes that human beings can respond to the revelation they receive from God. Yet, on the other hand, being created in the image of God also presupposes the fact that human beings are capable of choosing their own direction and making their own gods in conflict with the one true God (Gnanakan 1992:207).

The one God who reveals decisively in Jesus Christ does not in any way suggest that that God also has not been seeking positive response from those who have not known Christ consciously, however misleading and inadequate in some ways their apprehension of the divine Reality has been. Cooke even goes so far as to assert: “Our conviction that it is the One True God who is thus revealed forbids us to preclude in advance that God has also *authentically* revealed himself to the religious consciousness of man outside the biblical history” (1962:150). Is there then plurality in God’s revelation?

Revelational Plurality

Wrestling with the Christian doctrine of revelation can either give the Christian faith openness toward other faiths or close the door toward them.

Carl Braatan, a Lutheran evangelical theologian, finds, among the contemporary Lutheran theologians from various school of thoughts, a broad understanding of God's revelation at work in the religions without any necessary historical connection with the Bible and the Christian tradition (1992:67).³

Braatan says that the witness to "God the Creator of all things" comes prior to the confession of Christ who came "for us and our salvation" (1992:67). He writes: "We find in the religions an echo of God's activity in all expressions of life because God has not left himself without a witness among the nations (Acts 14:16-17)" (1992:67).⁴ Pinnock, along the same line, says that it cannot be denied that there are elements of truth and nobility in what the non-Christians believe and what they do (1992:82). Religions in this sense owe whatever is good and noble in them to the ongoing activity of God. Because cultures are diverse, the results of God's revelatory activity will be to some extent diverse.

Revelational plurality then means that divine disclosure and the human responses to that disclosure are diverse. God discloses Godself in more than one way in different periods and contexts however limited and veiled the revelation might be historically, religiously, and culturally. According to Braatan,

The way of Christ is one of them, but another way is revealed in the religions. Christian theology views the religions as bearing their own special witness to God's ongoing activity in the world and through the many dimensions of law which upholds order in society. God is active through the structures of common human

experience, and God is universally experienced in all the religions as a pressure that drives people to seek what is right and just and good and true. . . . Under the pressure of God's activity, people are bound to respond; and religion is behind the quest for God, and the religions are full of stories of people setting out in search of truth and the meaning of both their own existence and all reality. (1992:68)

This suggests that God has revealed Godself in other religions in diverse forms and fashions, both in content and activity. This plural view of revelation means that from the one Source stems a plurality of revelations different, though similar, in all.

It is possible to distinguish between revelation as disclosure and revelation as discovery. When God leaves traces of truth for human discovery it could be understood as general revelation or a revelation of discovery. When God actively initiates a self-disclosure in event or concept it can be termed a revelatory disclosure. For our purposes, however, both of these will be considered revelation, since they both have their origin in God's desire to be known.

The concept of revelational plurality acknowledges God's ongoing activity through the Spirit in the religious spheres in which human beings find themselves. Religion is an essential component of a society or culture which provides opportunity and atmosphere to respond to God the Creator. Encountering religious people in their different religious traditions will provide evidence of their responses to God. One can also perceive voices pointing to the

revelation of God's power and truth in the sacred writings of the various religions (Braatan 1992:69).

This view of revelation in religions is not merely a philosophical construction but one based in the New Testament.

The New Testament nowhere makes the claim that Christ is the one and only revelation of God in history and to humanity. The presupposition of the gospel message is that God has already spoken his Word, that people already encounter God and know him in some way apart from the biblical witness. (Braatan 1992:69)

This alludes to the possibility that prior to the full and final self-disclosure of God disclosed in Jesus Christ, God had already revealed Godself universally through "the cosmos, conscience, and the human spirit" (Dulles 1992:179). Thus it was possible for people in different contexts and cultures to discover and respond to God's self-disclosure in diverse ways.

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul affirms a divine revelation prior to and apart from the historical revelation in Jesus Christ. This means that divine revelation is taking place through the visible reality of the creation and human experience. However, Paul does not affirm a true knowledge of God in the religions for its own sake. In other words, such revelation is not final and full but partial and preparatory. This preparatory revelation, according to an Indian evangelical theologian Ken Gnanakan,

made available to the whole world must undoubtedly provide for religion the fundamental factor that will essentially link us with all men and women, rather than separating us from a world to which we integrally belong. The fact that people are made in the image of God must invest them with a capacity to know God, although their sin hinders them from fully recognizing him and receiving the redemptive benefits of this knowledge. (1992:204)

Gnanakan goes on to say that "Religious traditions, even religions themselves may be filled with error, human and demonic influences, but there is an essential core behind with a direction towards the divine. That is the common element that we need to discover" (1992:205). Along the same line, another prominent Indian theologian, M. M. Thomas, writes: "The core of any religion is the nature of the response of the people to the pressure of the Ultimate Reality on their spirit. The initiative remains with the transcendent Holy, the Truth that makes itself known at the center of human selfhood" (1987:8). Thomas perceives this human response as the "core of faith" in any religion, and "faith thus understood is the transcendent spiritual center of a religion" (1987:8).

Two things are very clear from the passages quoted from Braatan and Gnanakan: first, the phenomenological study of religions as independent units points to the fact that in religious traditions, despite errors and demonic influences, there are elements of truth, nobility, and a longing to know God fully, and that cannot be denied; second, looking at religions in this way does not entail accepting every religion on equal grounds. Our point here is that these religions are not totally devoid of divine revelation.

In contrast, there is no place in Kraemer's Christian exclusivism for the possibility of truth existing outside special revelation in Christ (Young 1970:27). Kraemer and Nash, in the interest of stressing the *only Christ*, project other religions as devoid of God's activity and generated out of human need and imagination. That is why Kraemer and Nash are critical of any possibility of divine

disclosure which can be experienced outside the Christian faith. Since there is no option for any possibility of revelation in other faiths, Kraemer does not see any meaning in the phrase "point of contact." For example, the Hindu god, Vishnu, is referred to in the Hindu classical literature as having personal traits. It is easy to think that there is a similarity here to the personal God of the Christian faith. But both Kraemer and Nash would conclude from such illustrations that the term point of contact has little use as a missionary or theological concept, precisely because they believe that revelationally there is a radical discontinuity between Christianity and other faiths.

Considering his view of revelation, what relationship is possible toward other religions? Kraemer does say, however, "yes" and "no" to other religions (1956:231-33). Kraemer would call his position dialectical and attempt to say many positive things about God's activity in the human history, and at the same time speaking his "no" to all human striving after God (Young 1970:30).

Usually when Kraemer uses the word "dialectical" in relation to the Christian theology of religions, the word does not convey the tension of paradox as it does in this research. Stephen Neill, a missionary theologian, observes this of Kraemer's books, particularly Religion and the Christian Faith (1956). Neill believes that the "yes" and "no" in Kraemer's thinking are on parallel lines rather than in creative tension (1959:24ff). That is to say, when God's work in other religions is not acknowledged, whatever appreciation there is of other religions is struck down by the "no," precisely because they are not seen in God's revelatory

light. An appreciation for other religious traditions does not necessarily mean openness to them. A dialectic without tension is not a true dialectic.

There is commonality found in various religious traditions because God's revelation is present in them. However, all religions are not the same, as the pluralists argue. They are different because there is plurality in God's revelation and human response to that revelation is historically and culturally conditioned. Commonality in various religious traditions does not imply in any way the *sameness* of revelation. That is to say, all religious traditions have equal revelation. The pluralist view of revelation suggests there is one source, providing common revelation of equal validity in all. A dialectical view of revelation suggests there is one source, yielding a diversity of revelations different though similar in all.

Seen from the perspective of the Christian faith, "revelation is a divine disclosure, not just a fact disclosure" (Young 1970:50). Divine disclosure, again from the standpoint of the Christian faith, is to some extent a mystery. The mysterious nature of divine disclosure is thus diverse. Paul Tillich uses mystery as one of his marks of revelation. He points out that whatever is mysterious cannot lose its mysteriousness even when it is revealed. It is not, therefore, necessary to conclude that since God has acted in Jesus Christ there is nothing more to know about God and God's acts.

Something more is known of the mystery after it has become manifest in revelation. First, its reality has become a matter of experience. Second, our relation to it has become a matter of experience. Both of these are cognitive elements. But revelation does not dissolve the mystery into knowledge. (Tillich 1951:109)

In a similar line of thought, John Baillie, while discussing revelation, says:

“The mystery becomes a mystery only in being disclosed, while at the same time, if it were fully disclosed, it would cease to be mystery” (1956:59). Father Bulgakoff, the Eastern Orthodox theologian, reiterates the same when he writes: “Mystery ceases to be a mystery if it is not disclosed; or on the other hand, if it is resolved or exhausted by the process of revelation. . . . Revelation, therefore, is of the very nature of Deity. God is a self-disclosing Mystery” (1937:147).

The mystery of revelation then suggests that God’s revelation is not exhausted in one singular event. It is continuous. God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ is final, however it does not mean it is exhaustive. God has revealed, is revealing, and will continue to reveal, to surprise us with the mystery. In these days of the increase in knowledge of other religions this mysterious nature of revelation needs to be emphasized so that it can deepen our commitment to discern where God is at work.

The plural view of revelation thus opens a door for some commonality in our understanding of God, the Supreme Being. It is very instructive to note that early Hinduism as known from the *Rig Veda* (3000-1500 BC) pointed to a monotheism rather than to the polytheism that Christian theologians so often associate with this religion (Gnanakan 1992:207). It is therefore possible to say that monotheism is the original understanding of the Hindu concept of God with which people responded to the revelation of the divine. Monotheism may not be a product of a long process of evolution. Polytheistic understandings of God may

not have evolved into monotheistic understandings. Rather, it could well be the opposite.⁵

This must apply, according to Gnanakan, on the basis of one of two things. Either, an exchange of the thoughts and ideas pertaining to God as people traveled around accounted for this commonness reflected in the various scriptures. Or else, there is some form of general revelation from which all people draw their understanding of God. "I am convinced that it is the latter that the biblical teaching points towards" (1992:207).⁶

It is evident that the pluralists and the conciliar inclusivists believe more or less that all the religions are true and valid paths to salvation. This is based on their assumption that all religions are basically saying the same thing. Or from the inclusivists' point of view, there is one cosmic reality present in all. This view, in the light of Christian theology of religions, is unrealistic. This view not only ignores a fair amount of difference among the religions, but also denies a great deal of human sinfulness, wickedness, and demonic influences that exist in all religions (Pinnock 1992:83). In this sense religions also create a climate that makes it difficult for the respective followers to respond to God.

On the other extreme of the spectrum, is the exclusivistic position. The exclusivists judge all religions false with the exception of theirs. Exclusivists, like Barth, Kraemer, and Nash, usually consider Christianity true and other religions false. About the exclusivistic position, Pinnock says, "Though reflecting a commendably high estimate of the finality of Jesus Christ, this is an odd position

in that it is so positive about the religiosity of Christians, while so negative about the religiosity of everybody else” (1992:83).

Speaking from the practical point of view, it would seem to me reasonable that people who are themselves religious would be more open and sympathetic toward the people of other faiths. They would see God and God's activity in a different light. This world is God's parish not ours. We are partners with God in God's parish. When we begin to partner with God, we see more of God's work than ours.

There is some form or fashion of revelation both in content and activity in other religious traditions. This revelation may or may not be independent of Christ, but certainly it is not in contradiction to the finality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Although revelation and salvation are presumably related, it would be improper to assume that the presence of revelation in a religion makes it a medium of salvation.

The commonality of revelation, argued by the pluralists, accepts all religions on equal terms. All religions have similar values. All religions, though taking different paths, lead to one and the same God. The exclusivist model takes no or too little account of the workings of God in the history and experience of the unevangelized. However the plurality of revelation view, while it acknowledges God's revelatory activity in different religious persons and traditions in different times and their response to that activity at different levels, does not imply that all religions or religious persons stand on equal footing.

Revelation is plural, but the giver of this revelation is one. It pleased God to reveal Godself through different modes at different times, and the culmination of this revelation we find in Jesus, God incarnate (Hebrew 1:1-4). It is in the incarnate Jesus that God the Creator is finally known (Colossians 1:15). Jesus Christ, then, is the particularity of God's plural revelation.

Christological Particularity

In affirming that Jesus is the final revelation of God, Paul writes, "Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Paul says, in effect, that in Jesus Christ we see God, "not in his ontological being or essence but in his attributes of love and holiness and in his relationship to God as Father and God as Holy Spirit" (Nicholls 1998:239).

Hinduism also believes seriously in the possibility of the gods taking human form. Of the ten *avatars* of Vishnu, God the Preserver, Rama and Krishna are the best known and most loved of God in human form. It is interesting to observe that until recently Hindus were willing to accept these *avatars* as mythical, teaching religious stories. However, today there is a growing movement among the Hindus in general to believe that Rama and Krishna were historical persons born at a specific place and time. The prolonged tension between Hindus and Muslims over the site of the birth of Rama at Ayodhya and Krishna at Mathura in North India indicates the importance history now has for Hindu understanding.

Nevertheless, it is believed in Hinduism that these *avatars* come again and again, some in human form and others in the form of animals, such as a fish, tortoise, boar or a man-lion. *Avatars* emanate from God and return to God in an evolutionary process. They are sent to destroy the unrighteous and preserve the righteous.⁷ Thus it is safe to state that Christ and Krishna are not alternate names for revealing the invisible God fully and finally in human form. Recognizing this leaves Jesus Christ the particular and incomparable revelation of God in the midst of religious plurality.

It is interesting to note that, while Hindus in the east are searching beyond myth to history, the pluralists, such as Hick and Knitter, in the West are seeking to reduce history to mythology and contend that any claim to the uniqueness or finality of Jesus Christ must be relegated to the realm of myth.

God becomes visible in Jesus because incarnation is God's saving act in human history. For the Christians, Jesus Christ reveals God fully and finally because the incarnation is an unrepeatable event in time and space; the cross is a once and for all event for salvation; and the resurrection is a beginning of the eschatological hope. Christians hope that when Jesus returns on the earth "we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is" (1 John 3:2). This hope is not only futuristic but has implications for daily living. "Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Christ's resurrection is the unique fact in history. Hindus may believe in many *avatars*, descents of God to earth; they may accept the cross as an act of

self-denial and self-sacrifice, which is a Hindu ideal, but they have no answer to the resurrection of the body. If Jesus is the only way to God it is because the salvation of the person, body and spirit, is a hope profoundly different from all other religious hope. It gives new dimension to salvation not found anywhere else. It is true that Muslims hope for the resurrection but as a recovery of the pleasures of this life, and certainly not to be transformed into the glory of the image of the risen Christ. In this sense it is reasonable to say that Hinduism and Islam may have some eschatology but they are not eschatological. Christianity, on the other hand, has eschatology and is also eschatological because of the belief in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Christ is an issue of fundamental importance to Christian faith and Christian theology. It is an incomparable reality. No religious leader or religion has ever made such a claim. This conviction about the reality of resurrection sets Christianity apart from all other religions, and makes Jesus Christ decisively revelational and salvific. The resurrected Christ revealed that God was in Christ and Christ was in God. The particularity of Christ is affirmed because of Christ's resurrection.

The gospel writers narrate the life and work of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the resurrection. Moreover, from the perspective of resurrection belief, it was affirmed by the early Christians that Jesus was present among them through his continuing Spirit.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was born in a manger in Bethlehem, and died on the cross at Golgotha, is the foundation and the fulfillment both of the Christian faith and of Christian theology. Hence, the apostle Paul stated, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and your faith is futile" (1 Corinthians 15:14,17). Paul's argument here is that if Jesus was not literally raised from the dead, then the entire Christian faith is fallacious (vs.14) and ineffective (vs.17). Furthermore, preaching is useless (vs.14), Christian witness is false (vs.15), no sins have been forgiven (vs.17), and believers have perished without any hope (vs.18). The logical conclusion is that, apart from this event, Christians are the most pitiable people (vs.19).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is significant in affirming the particularity of Christ. This event sets him apart from all other religions. Nowhere in Hinduism and Islam does the event of resurrection occur. Islam talks about a future resurrection of the dead but makes no other claim about resurrection. The particularity of Christ is derived primarily from the reality of his resurrection.

The pluralists undermined the importance of the resurrection of Christ in the discussion when they edited the controversial volume of essays entitled The Myth of God Incarnate (Hick 1977). John Austin Baker noted that by leaving the resurrection of Christ out of the discussion, the contributors to The Myth of God Incarnate certainly made their task easier but, "they also made the finished product superficial and very much less helpful to the debate they desire than it might have been" (1978:297).

The resurrection of Christ is so important that Jürgen Moltmann, a contemporary German theologian, makes it central to his theology and argues for the historical resurrection from an eschatological perspective. Moltmann's description of the significance of the resurrection is instituted by the fundamental concept—the “identity” of Jesus (1967:197-99). Moltmann says that when the identity of Jesus is seen in relation to the cross and to the resurrection, the identity of Jesus stands out in total contradiction. For Moltmann, the cross and the resurrection are two opposite poles; one represents death, and the other life; one represents god-forsakenness, and the other God-with-us; one represents hopelessness, and the other hopefulness. In other words, both represent an absolute contradiction. However, Moltmann does not hesitate to identify the crucified Jesus with the risen Christ (1974:178-86). He explicitly states on several occasions that the one who was crucified was the one who was raised. The crucified Jesus was the resurrected Christ, and the resurrected Christ was the crucified Jesus. Hence, the appearances of the risen Christ are important to Moltmann, because it is in his resurrection appearances that the risen Christ is identified as Jesus of Nazareth, who died on the cross of Calvary. There existed an identity even in contradiction. There is a continuity even in discontinuity. Bauckham aptly calls it “a dialectical Christology, in which Jesus' identity is sustained in contradiction” (1989:203).

“Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8) becomes salvific and significant only if seen in the light of the resurrection of Jesus. This does not mean that the

resurrection nullifies the cross (1 Corinthians 1:17), but rather, "fills it with eschatology and saving significance" (Bauckham 1989:182). In other words, Moltmann is saying that the cross does not reveal its salvific significance if detached from the resurrection. Likewise, the resurrection does not reveal its eschatological significance if detached from the cross. The cross reveals its saving significance in the light of the resurrection; and the resurrection reveals its eschatological significance in the light of the cross. This is the meaning of the dialectic of the cross and resurrection—the cross in the resurrection, and the resurrection in the cross.

The particularity of Christ derived from the event of his resurrection not only makes him unique but also universal. Jesus was raised by the Spirit and raised in the Spirit. The resurrected Christ is then universally unique and uniquely universal. The Spirit who brought him into life now makes him known universally.

A commitment to high christology does not necessarily shut the door for openness in other religions. The confessions of the early church and of modern Christian theology about Jesus Christ are compatible "with an open spirit, with an optimism of salvation, and with a wider hope" (Pinnock 1992:74). Pluralists think that a radical revision of christology is required for being sensitive to the reality of religious pluralism.⁸ Both Hick and Knitter, in an attempt to affirm the plurality of religions, relativize the doctrine of Christ, and thus make Christ one among many. One does not need to sacrifice the particularity of Christ in order to please

other faiths. There is openness, but no relativity in christology. This sense of openness to religious plurality does not require a radical revision of the doctrine of Christ. It does require, however, viewing christology in dialectical tensionality in the manner of the Chalcedonian understanding of christology. The particularity of Christ is not opposed to the universality of God's salvation, and vice versa. Both particularity and universality are held in tension, and this tension needs to be maintained in the light of Christian commitment to Jesus Christ and openness to other faiths. "According to the New Testament, the work of redemption, which spans all ages and continents and comes to fullest expression at a particular point in history, also issues out again into universality" (Pinnock 1992:74).

The dilemma of a Christian theology of religions is to recognize Christ as both universal and unique. One of the possible ways to do justice to both a uniqueness that does not undermine the importance of the plurality of religions and a universality that does not relativize the particularity of Christ is to reconsider some form of Spirit christology.

Spirit christology, on the analogy of the two natures of Christ, can mean that although Son and Spirit act separately, they always act in relation to each other. They are independently-dependent. Both persons maintain their own distinct personhood in unceasing communication with the other. That is, each always acts in communion with the other. There is no supremacy of Son or Spirit over each other nor do the two persons ever dissolve into one. A healthy tension is retained between the independence and interdependence of Son and Spirit.

To use Chalcedonian language, Spirit and Son are united in one Godhead, but each person is complete and retains its distinctive character and operation.

Such a christological understanding deepens commitment to the historic Christ and brings openness toward other religious persons and faiths. This approach sees Christ's resurrection, death, and incarnation as having significance for all people, not only for those who *consciously* acknowledge his Lordship.

Jesus Christ is normative and not exhaustive in revealing God. "Without Jesus we cannot speak of God, but that speaking is never completely exhausted in history, for the Spirit constantly and in surprising ways calls us into a deeper understanding of God in Christ" (D'Costa 1990:18-19). This means that the Spirit mediates between the universality of God and the particularity of Jesus Christ. If Jesus does not exhaust all of God's revelation, then it is possible to encounter God's revelational activity outside of Christian faith through the Spirit. We are committed to God's particular revelation in Jesus Christ; we are also open to the universal activity of the Spirit. The role of the Spirit in the trinitarian framework allows the particularity of Jesus Christ to relate to the universal activity of God in the history of humankind (D'Costa 1990:19; Gnanakan 1992:84-85). D'Costa suggests, "There are no good theological reasons to suggest that God's activity has stopped, but rather, given the universal salvific will of the Father revealed in Christ, we can have every expectation that God's activity in history is ongoing and certainly not historically limited to Christianity" (1990:19). D'Costa may be

right in suggesting that God's activity is not historically limited to Christianity. But this however does not mean that the activity of the Holy Spirit outside of Christian faith is not somehow complementary to the finality of the revelatory activity of God through Jesus Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit is to prepare people for experiencing salvation, not in any form of anonymity, but always in relation to the particular revelatory act of God in Jesus Christ. The Spirit then allows both the particularity of Christ to be related to the universal activity of God, and the universal activity of God to the particularity of Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit thus helps us in holding the exclusivist emphasis of the particularity of Christ and the pluralist emphasis on the universality of God's activity in human history in dialectical tension. The Spirit is working in the world independently-dependent.

The importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Christian theology of religions has become quite evident in the inclusivistic thinking of the Eastern Orthodox church.

Orthodox inclusivism differs from conciliar inclusivism in that Orthodoxy stresses that the Holy Spirit operates in the world distinct from the Son.

Metropolitan Georges Khodr says,

The Spirit is present everywhere and fills everything by virtue of an economy distinct from that of the Son. . . . This means that we must affirm not only their hypostatic independence but also that the advent of the Holy Spirit in the world is not subordinated to the Son, is not simply a function of the Word. . . . Between the two economies there is a reciprocity and a mutual service. . . . It is he who fashions Christ within us. And, since Pentecost it is he who makes Christ present. It is he who makes Christ an inner reality here and now. . . . The Spirit operates and applies his energies in

accordance with his own economy and we could, from this angle, regard the non-Christian religions as points where his inspiration is at work. (Khodr 1971:172-73)

There are three things to be noted here. First, the truths in other faiths can be said to derive from the same Spirit of God. Second, the Spirit is also the bridge between the Son and the other faiths, working in them to make the cross of the risen Christ known. Third, though the Spirit is at work everywhere independent of the Son, there is mutual reciprocity between the Spirit and the Son. That is to say, while they are independent in their economy, in their mission they are dependent.

This Spirit christology helps avoid the danger of viewing Christ's relation to other religions in terms of radical discontinuity, radical continuity, and radical relativism. To say that Christ is absolutely discontinuous from other religious traditions is to imply a denial of the prevenient activity of the Holy Spirit. To say that Christ is inclusively anonymous in all religions is to imply a reduction of particular religions to one world religion. If Kraemer speaks of radical discontinuity, Rahner speaks for radical continuity. God's grace is available universally, whether it be in a religious tradition or outside it. Grace is operative in other religions and one can encounter it. However, this is not saving grace. It is grace that if responded to in faith will lead toward experiencing salvation.

Soteriological Experientiality

The exclusivists assert that there are statements in the Bible that apparently have restrictive meaning, and that limit revelation to the historic event in Jesus Christ. There are two verses in particular: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

According to the exclusivists, these verses teach that only those who consciously profess faith in Jesus Christ can have a saving knowledge of God. In other words, all non-Christians, who do not possess an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ, are regarded as outside the way of salvation.

The pluralists deny the veracity of these verses, claiming that they are mythical statements and not based on historical truth. Their position avoids their potential veracity rather than facing it squarely. Rahner functions with the hermeneutic of anonymous Christians, therefore, these verses do not cause much problem to his inclusive soteriology. However, his theory of anonymous Christianity undermines the significance of the incarnation as a whole. It does so by minimizing the necessity for conversion, and by accepting other religious traditions as genuine vehicles of salvation. It is one thing to say that the grace of God is present in the lives of non-Christian individuals as the source operating for their possible salvation. But to extend it to institutional non-Christian religions

is to deny the newness of the gospel and the historicity of the incarnation (Race 1982:53).

Commenting on Acts 4:12, Pinnock says Peter was referring to messianic salvation without denying pre-messianic occurrences of God's grace (1992:78-79). That is to say, the affirmation of God's salvation in Jesus Christ does not deny God's prevenient grace at work beyond Palestine and before the time of Jesus.

It can also be argued that, in the pre-Vatican II view, the church was the sole and exclusive place where salvation was known, but in the conciliar inclusivism salvation is not confined to the church. In the conciliar inclusivism the hidden presence of Christ enables the respective religious traditions to become the vehicles of salvation for their respective followers. This illustrates Rahner's doctrine of "supernatural existential." That is to say, the grace of Christ is not only operative in, but also mediated through, non-Christian religions for salvific purposes. This means the adherents of the non-Christian faiths, regardless of their faith commitment, are regarded as "anonymous Christians." This is the logical outcome of the conciliar inclusivist theory. In the Christian theology of religions it means that the relationship between Christianity and the other religions "can be known on the basis of our knowledge of Christianity alone, quite apart from any knowledge of those other faiths themselves" (Wiles 1979:32). For this reason the move from an exclusive to an inclusive understanding of the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity is unsatisfactory. The inclusivist position

pre-judges the other religions, and this line of approach represents a refusal to take seriously the other faiths on their own terms. Race asserts,

In an age that values the historical and empirical, to say that one religion contains the fullest expression of religious truth and value, without any recourse to the empirical data of the other religions themselves, is tantamount to an unjustified theological imperialism. In this respect the openness since Vatican II in Catholic theology is only partial and begs many questions. (1982:68)

Hinduism offers three paths to salvation. First, *Karma marga*, the way of good deeds and faithful ritual practice, is the most common path to earning salvation. It focuses on temple worship both public and private, pilgrimage, taking a dip in the holy Ganges, and observing festivals through which God's favor is gained. The second, *Bhakti marga*, is the way of devotion and love to God. It appears to be closer to the Christian understanding of steadfast love (*hesed*). The goal of this path again is to merit God's favor. The third way is *Jnana marga*, the way of higher and mystical knowledge. This is achieved through yogic discipline and ascetic practices. It is more a way of philosophy than popular religion (James 1992:133-38; Nicholls 1998:241).

The most popular of all Hindu scriptures, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which in recent times has gained the status of *sruti* (revealed) as opposed to *smarti* (remembered) scripture, offers all three ways as complementary. These paths are also common to other faiths including Islam. These paths, followed in Hinduism, Buddhism or in Islam, teach that self-action is necessary to win the favor of God in order to reach negation of the self, the bliss of nirvana, or *zannet*.

The Christian faith rejects all three ways as favor-earning paths to God, but accepts and uses all three in the pursuit of living the Christian life. The Christian faith affirms salvation by grace alone. Grace is understood to be the unmerited and undeserved gift of God. Because of God's activity within these religions, grace is operative and may be encountered in them. The Apostle Paul finds both an awareness of the awesomeness of God, the Creator, and a law of conscience among all people (Romans 1:20; 2:14-15).

Bruce Nicholls⁹ says that the sign of grace can be found in the Southern Vaishnavite faith, a branch of Hinduism, since the days of Pillai Lokachari (1264-1327 AD). He taught salvation by grace alone. Lokachari's guiding scripture was the *Charama Sloka* from the Gita where Krishna says "Abandon every duty, come to me alone for refuge. I will release you from all sin" (18:6) (1998:242). If, however, the verse is seen as a part of the Gita, it becomes clear that even here grace becomes a "crutch" not the basis for salvation.

Paul summarized the way of salvation when he wrote: "For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts but God's gift so that no one can boast about it" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Christian way to salvation actually is the way of *Anugraha* (grace). The other paths, *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jnana*, are useful means to work out salvation. The way of *anugraha* is the only basis for salvation. And apart from the cross of Christ the true meaning of grace cannot be fully understood. The cross stands as God's full and final revelation of salvation for all.

If people of other Faiths turn from their sinful ways and cast themselves entirely on the mercy of the creator-redeemer God, even if they do not know his name, this is a sign of God's grace upon them. We cannot claim that the grace of God is limited to the boundary of the Christian Church, but we can affirm with the early Church, 'Salvation is to be found through him [Jesus] alone; in all the world there is no one else who God has given who can save us' (Acts 4:12). (Nicholls 1998:242-43)

The other religions do not make any claim of resurrection for their religious leaders. This feature of Christianity makes Jesus Christ the final revelation of God and the promise to God's salvation. Other religions have concepts of salvation and one may encounter in them a possibility of salvation, but there is no promise behind them. Christianity shows that there is a promise of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God's promise of salvation to all humankind.

Does the affirmation of the uniqueness and finality of God's self revelation in Jesus Christ mean there is no truth in other religions and that adherents of other religions will be lost for ever? Exclusivists such as Kraemer and Nash do take this position. The Congress on World Mission at Chicago in 1960 stated: "In the years since the war, more than one billion souls have passed into eternity and more than half of these went to the torment of hell fire without even hearing of Jesus Christ, who he was, or why he died on the cross of Calvary" (Percy and Bennett 1961:9). Does this mean that the Holy Spirit is not at work in the lives of the people of other faiths? Is grace confined to the church only?

J.H. Bavinck, a missiologist, though refusing to regard other religions as ways of salvation, quotes with approval the words of a missionary who for many years worked in a prison in South Africa.

I have frequently found God in the soul of the South African Bantu. Certainly, it is not the full revelation of the Father. But nevertheless, God himself is the one who lies hidden behind a curtain, as a shadowy figure, but the main outline is visible. A surprising and glorious experience! And when I experienced the moment that a soul surrenders, I understood that the Master had been there earlier. (Bavinck 1960:227)

J. Verkuyl, also a missiologist, fully affirms the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ is unique, incomparable and decisive for all ages and peoples" (1978:358). At the same time he expresses his positive appreciation for what he finds in other religions. In the section on God, he asks: "How was God involved when the Vedas were being transmitted? What went on between God and Gautama Buddha when the latter received the Bodhi? What transpired between God and Muhammad when he meditated in the grotto?" (1978:356). In the section on Christ, he says: "A theologian of religions who remembers this christological dimension will keep looking for evidences of this Christ who is ceaselessly active; he will be alert for signs of the messianic kingdom in the religious life of mankind both inside and outside the church" (1978:359). In the section of the Spirit, he writes: "The convert need not leave everything of his former life behind. His manner of being, living, and thinking may well contain much that stems from God himself, which, when placed within the context of a

Christocentric universalism and directed toward Christ, can shoot forth a new blossom" (1978:360).

As is evident from these quotes, these missiologists believe the Holy Spirit or the grace of God is active in many ways in the lives of the people of other faiths. It is possible to affirm the finality of God's salvation through Jesus Christ, and yet to remain open to the activity of the Holy Spirit in other religious traditions and people. Verkuyl even asks the question: "Is it really possible for any one of us to believe that human beings can be found somewhere who have not been touched by the hand of Jesus Christ who goes out to them in reconciliation?" (1978:359).

Christians affirm that Jesus is the only promised way to God. One of the reasons Christians find this way to God convincingly true is that in Jesus Christ the quests of other faiths find coherent answers. Each religion is unique. Each religion has its own sun around which the planets move. For example, Hinduism grapples with the nature of self, Buddhism grapples with the nature and cause of suffering, Islam with the way to submit to *Allah*, the Almighty Creator, primal religions with overcoming evil spirits. The Bible shows how God in Christ promises to fulfill each of these human aspirations. Jesus said to Thomas. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Nicholls argues that everyone, regardless of religious or cultural background, is "insatiably religious" or spiritual (1998:228). All people have

spiritual yearnings even though they might not actually be religious. In the case of Hindus the depth of the spiritual search is very real and intense. For over 3,000 years millions of sincere Hindus have prayed daily the sacred Upanishadic prayer: "From untruth lead me to truth. From darkness lead me to light. From death lead me to immortality" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28). There have been many saints in the history of Hinduism who have sought after the Reality beyond with great intensity. One such was, Tukuram, who lived in India 350 years ago. He followed the path of *Bhakti* (intense devotion). In one of his poems he cries:

As on the bank the poor fish lies
And gasps and writhes in pain,
Or as a man with anxious eyes
Seeks hidden gold in vain, —
So is my heart distressed and cries
To come to thee again
Have mercy Tuku says. (cited in Nicholls 1998:229)

Commenting on this poem, Nicholls says, "It is very unlikely that he has any knowledge of Jesus but the intensity of the images used suggests that the living God was calling him. His search for God proved to be the bridge over which the great 20th century Brahmin Marathi poet, Narayan Vaman Tilak, came to faith in Jesus Christ" (1998:229).

Nicholls writes from his personal experience about the depth of spiritual searching for God in other religions:

The intensity of Hindus searching for God is a rebuke to Christians. In the Himalayas I have been privileged to climb to the sacred temple at Kedarnath at 13,000 feet and see the endless stream of pilgrims crying out to Shiva for a *darshan* or vision of God. I have also stood by the banks of the sacred Ganges where it breaks out

of the Himalayas at Rishikesh and Hardwar, and empathized with the thousands of people bathing in the cold waters to be cleansed from their past sins. I have watched Tibetan Buddhists incessantly turning their prayer wheels and Zen Buddhists sitting perfectly erect in the traditional lotus position disciplining their minds to glimpse the meaning of life beyond rationality. I have often been awakened before daybreak by the call to prayer of the minaret. I have watched faithful Muslims prostrating themselves in a railway carriage or in the airport at the hour of prayer. Muslims have an intense desire to be faithful to God and no sacrifices are too great for them to make in the defense and proclaiming of their faith. Yes, the whole human race is incurably spiritual. (1998:230)

Don Richardson, a former missionary, in his book Eternity in Their Hearts (1981) describes a world in many ways prepared for the gospel by means of redemptive analogies and bridges. Richardson has documented many stories to show God at work redemptively with people groups prior to Christian missionaries.

Revelational plurality refers to the fact of divine revelation in other religions independent of Christ but not in contradiction to Christ. This understanding admits that grace is operative in other religious traditions. But this understanding does not suggest that other religious traditions are themselves the vehicles of mediating grace. Thus salvation may be possible outside the church but not outside of grace. There is a possibility but no promise of salvation in other religions. The promise of salvation is in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This interpretation and understanding of salvation is faithful to the Bible and to other religious traditions. Other religions emphasize working on one's salvation with no assurance. Christianity promises the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Pinnock declares “Jesus to be the fundamental way to salvation as God’s eternal Son and sacrifice but does not confine the saving impact of God’s saving work to one segment of history. God has been at work saving human beings before Jesus was born and does so where Jesus has not been named” (Pinnock 1995:110). For example, Abraham was justified by faith even though he did not know Jesus and his gospel consciously (Romans 4:1-25). The ontological necessity of Christ’s work of redemption is distinguished from the necessity of the epistemological knowledge. Pinnock thus says, “There is no salvation except through Christ but it is not necessary for everybody to possess a conscious knowledge of Christ in order to benefit from redemption through him” (1992:75). For example, Job in the Old Testament was saved by Christ (ontologically) without actually knowing the name Jesus (epistemologically).

Salvation is by grace not by knowledge. If salvation is by knowledge, then the Advaitic philosophy of Hinduism, which employs *jnana marga*, is the best way to attain salvation. Commitment to Jesus as the Savior of the world leaves room to be open to God’s activity of prevenient grace in the sphere of other religious traditions and persons. “The Spirit is universally present in the world as well as uniquely present in the fellowship of the church” (Pinnock 1995:110).

The popular Christian writer C.S. Lewis believed that those who commit themselves in faith to that which lies behind all truth and goodness will experience salvation even if they are ignorant of Jesus. “There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on

those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it" (Lewis 1960:65,176).

God reaches out to the world through both the Son and the Spirit. God does not leave Godself without witness to any people. Salvation is made possible and promised only by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, but God may apply that work even to those who are ignorant of the atonement. God does this if people respond in trusting faith to the revelation they have. In other words, unevangelized persons may experience salvation on the basis of Christ's work if they respond in faith to the God who created them (Sanders 1995:35-36).

One and Many: Dialectical Theology of Religions

Congruent with the historic model of dialectical tension in theologizing described in Chapter two, a dialectical Christian theology of religion seeks to do justice to the Christian affirmation of the finality of God's revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ without sacrificing an openness to other faiths. This approach opens up the way for a positive and theological view of Christianity, which can see other religions also as ways of response to God.

Pinnock's modal inclusivist position, though closely compatible with ours, does not provide an adequate theological basis for the plurality of religions and the particularity of Christ. He does not show *theologically* why and how these noble features are found in other religions. How does one account for the holy pagans in other religions? How are the religious people in other religious traditions saved without consciously believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Pinnock provides an epistemological answer to these questions. He would say we *know* the religious people in other religions are saved just as the saints in the Old Testament were saved. But his epistemology lacks a strong theological basis. How was God the Creator engaged in the lives of the Hebrew people and also in the lives of the people of other religious traditions? This question needs more than a mere epistemological basis.

My contention is that the doctrine of revelation is of paramount importance for constructing a *theology* of religions in general and for holding the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions together in particular. In Pinnock's modal inclusivism, we find a well developed case for the salvation of the unevangelized; but we do not find a sufficiently developed doctrine of revelation. Therefore, as we have noted, his theology of religions is epistemologically strong, but theologically less so. Furthermore, because of the lack of attention he gives to the doctrine of revelation, Pinnock talks more of the religious persons in other religions than of the religious traditions as a whole. As Rahner has shown, one cannot separate religious persons from their respective traditions. Although we might contend against Rahner that religious traditions do not necessarily become the vehicles of mediating grace, they, nevertheless, do provide an atmosphere and an opportunity to their respective followers for responding to God.

Christ is the final revelation of God but not the only revelation. There is plurality of God's revelation. That is why people respond to God in a variety of ways. That is why there is plurality of religions. That is why truth and nobility are

found in other religions. This is a theological understanding of the plurality of religions. This is what Pinnock's theology of religions appears to lack.

Along the same line, Pinnock rightly argues for the particularity of Christ; he does not however ground it theologically. He talks about the incarnation, cross, and resurrection, but nowhere does he derive fully the particularity of Christ from any one of these three events in the life of Christ. One cannot sustain the particularity of Christ without grounding it theologically. Especially in an attempt to construct a Christian theology of religions, the reality of the resurrection is vitally important to ground christological particularity theologically. Just as we must appeal to revelational plurality for grounding our theology of religions, so we must base our christological particularity on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the resurrection that makes Jesus Christ both unique and universal.

For Christians there is no other Savior beside Jesus. Yet it is still possible to approach non-Christian religions with an openness that does not reject, on a *priori* grounds, the possibility that these religions and the people belonging to them may contribute to our understanding of God's revelation and truth revealed in the historic Christ.

The belief in Jesus Christ as God's final revelation does not therefore suggest that there is nothing more to know about God's revelatory activity before and beyond the historic Christ. Jesus Christ is God's final revelation because God is fully and finally, but not exhaustively revealed in him. We know everything

about God in Jesus that we need to know now. But we do not know everything about God in Jesus what we ought to know in the future. God leads us through the Spirit into all truth (John 16:13). There is an *already* and a *not yet* element in God's revelatory activity in Christ.

The dialectical paradigm for a Christian theology of religions affirms both a commitment to the finality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and an openness to the truth and nobility found in other religions because of God's plural ways of revelation. This view holds that the affirmation in the finality of Jesus does not necessarily deny the importance of other religions in God's economy. That is to say, the Christian faith recognizes God's activity in other religions, and thus does not minimize the importance of listening to, and learning from, the people of other faiths in the hope of rediscovering Christ. In this sense, we reiterate that religions provide an atmosphere for their respective followers to respond to God's given revelation.

At the same time, the Christian faith in recognizing God's revelatory act in other religions does not pretend to be in agreement with everything they believe, nor does it overlook any demonic practices and patches of darkness in them. The pluralists and the conciliar inclusivists tend to ignore a great deal of human sinfulness and demonic influences that exist in other religions. The exclusivists rightly point to demonic practices and human wickedness found in other religions. We are not in contention with the exclusivists for pointing out the darkness that is present in other religions. It is congruent with our understanding

of religions. We cannot ignore or deny forces of evil and demonic devices present in religions.¹⁰ The Scriptures warn us against the kingdom of darkness and schemes of the evil one (2 Corinthians 2:11; Matthew 12:29). In this sense, we reiterate that religions also create an atmosphere that makes it difficult for their respective followers to respond to God's given revelation. But to say religions are totally demonic, dark, and deceptive is to deny the revelatory activity of God in them.¹¹

God's revelation is plural not singular. God's revelation in other religions is not in contradiction to what God has fully and finally revealed in Christ. This sheds light on the role of the Holy Spirit. The person and the work of Christ do not diminish the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Son is an aspect of the Spirit, and the Spirit is an aspect of the Son. There is then interdependence in the mission of the Son and the Spirit (Pinnock 1996:192). What the Holy Spirit does, does not contradict what is done in Christ. And what the Son does, does not contradict what is done through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The particular revelation of God in Christ then does not deny what God is doing through the Holy Spirit in other religions. What God is doing through the Holy Spirit in other religions does not contradict God's particular revelation in Jesus Christ. Like the tension of the divine and the human in Christ, the tension of the transcendence and the immanence of God, the tension between social action and evangelistic proclamation in the church's mission, the creative tension

between Son and Spirit like that between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions turns out to be both-and, not either-or.

The interdependent mission of the Son and the Spirit provides thus the perspective in encountering the people of other religions that we need to discern the prevenient grace of God present prior to any proclamation. This leads us to the missiological component in a Christian theology of religions, we call dialogical discernment.

¹ I coined the term *experientiality* for the purpose of parallel construction with *plurality* and *particularity*. The concept soteriological experientiality basically means salvation as experienced or experience-able.

² See Phan (1990:164 ff) for more discussion on this issue.

³ These Lutheran theologians are: Nathan Söderblom, Paul Tillich, Paul Althaus, Carl Heinz Ratschow, Gustaf Wingren, and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

⁴ Lutheran theology typically affirms a twofold revelation of God: through the hidden God of creation (*Deus absconditus*) and law and through the revealed God of covenant and gospel (*Deus revelatus*). Lutheran theologians use different terms in making this distinction.

⁵ Wilhelm Schmidt has made an impressive case that there was monotheism before there was polytheism. That is to say, polytheism represents monotheism in a degenerated state. See more on this, Capps (1995:87-9).

⁶ See also, Baago (1969:89-103); Boyd (1969:280ff).

⁷ A prominent Indian Christian theologian, A.J. Appasamy, has done an authoritative comparative study on the Hindu and Christian doctrine of *avatara* (1942:247-264).

⁸ See Knitter (1996:61-83).

⁹ Bruce Nicholls having retired from a missionary career in theological education and pastoral ministry in India, is engaged in writing and editing and lecturing across Asia. He is also the editor of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

¹⁰ See Rommen (1995) for spiritual darkness and warfare in the world.

¹¹ Ralph Winter depicts Hinduism as "the most perverted, most monstrous, most implacable, demonic-invaded part of this planet. There's just no question about it. The greatest, biggest, blackest, most hopeless mass of confusion, perversion, deception and oppression is this massive Hindu bloc" (1994:17).

CHAPTER 7

Dialogical Discernment: A Contextual Reality

A clear tension exists between the experientiality of salvation in other religious traditions and the urgency for Christian mission. The question is if people have access to salvation wherever they live in time and space, why is it urgent to take the gospel to them? Where is the motivation for missions if there is universal access to salvation? But apparently tension in these matters can be good.

Bosch argues that these three models, pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism, are inadequate because they attempt to resolve the tension in developing a Christian theology of religions. They all are too neat. There are no loose ends, no room left for surprises and unsolved puzzles. Even before the dialogue begins, all the crucial issues have been settled. Each time, in all these approaches, the tension snaps (1992:483). This conviction is congruent with the history of the church's doctrinal formulations as laid out above in Chapter two.

In the light of the proposed paradigm, we can maintain a dialectical relation between the dialogical nature and missionary nature of Christian faith. In this connection, Bosch rightly says that Christian faith has belatedly rediscovered its integrally dialogical nature; this discovery should, however, not be at the expense of its fundamentally missionary nature (1992:487).

The dialogical discernment model developed in this chapter is not an end in itself. Rather, it is an open-ended model. There are multiple models for doing Christian mission in the world today. Bosch recognizes the emergence of these

multiple models (1991:400-488). For our purpose, however, we will explore a dialogical discernment model. It is our understanding that this model provides a missiological strategy congruent with the dialectical Christian theology of religions we developed in Chapter six. Accordingly, this model thus seeks to preserve both the dialogical nature and the missionary nature of the Christian mission.

The Missionary Nature of The Church

In the past or the early part of this century, along with exclusivism has gone a missionary drive that has given a crusading look to the Christian faith. Much of this movement rested its theology on the much quoted verse “there is no other name under heaven given to men/women by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

An example of the type of Christian exclusivism that has predominated in the mission field is found in Julius Richter’s inaugural address before the senate of the theological faculty of Berlin on his appointment to the chair of the Science of Mission. According to Richter, mission writings should be “the trumpet call of an advancing army.” Other religions are to be studied so as to be “conquered” (1913:520). The climax of his theological exclusivism is contained in his summary:

Mission apologetics is that branch of theology which in opposition to the non-Christian religions, shows the Christian religion to be the Way, the Truth and the Life; which seeks to dispossess the non-Christian religions and to plant in their stead in the soil of heathen national life the evangelic faith and the Christian life. . . . It takes its position in the theological system as a new branch of apologetics which has still to be developed. In its method, it must be guided by

the fundamental principle that its object is not so much to defend Christianity as to supplant heathenism. (1913:540-41)

Almost while Richter was speaking, firsthand encounters with the saints of other religions were being made, putting to shame the mediocre discipleship of most Western Christians and undermining Christian mission. For example, when Vivekananda from India spoke in Chicago at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, people recognized his evident spiritual depth and many were quick to question the need for Christian mission. One newspaper, in commenting on Vivekananda's appearance, spoke for these people when it said: "After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation" (cited in Young 1970:20).

Right from the New Testament period Christian communicators have noticed many points of contact in other religious traditions. For example, *theos* and *logos* have been taken from non-Christian literature to describe the relationship between God and Christ (John 1:1-18). The Apostle John said, "the true light that enlightens every man was coming into this world" (1:9). Newbigin says John tells us Jesus is the light that enlightens every one. This text does not say anything about other religions, but it makes it impossible for the Christian to say that those outside the church are totally devoid of the truth (1981:5-6). Paul in Athens takes the concept of "to an unknown God" and proclaims the message of the known God in Jesus Christ. The story about Cornelius and Peter exhibits God's work in different nations and peoples. Peter acknowledged, "truly I

perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:35).

Many centuries before Richter's address, on the mission field, missionaries such as Francis Xavier had encountered a good number of educated, devout, and compassionate people of other faiths. They faced with question of whether all non-Christians went to hell because they have had no knowledge of Jesus Christ or were not baptized. Matteo Ricci (died 1610) went to China with a more open view in relation to grace outside the church. He attempted to develop more openness and respect for the cultures of the people outside the European Christian civilization. Robert de Nobili (died 1656), the Jesuit missionary to India, similarly tried to adapt to the religious culture of Hinduism, even dressing as a *sanyasi* (Gnanakan 1992:73). These missionaries took the religions of the respective people seriously. At the time of Richter's address the Catholic church had still not approved of what Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili had tried to do. But now the Vatican II Council has not only approved the openness with which Ricci and Nobili worked, but has gone beyond them to assert the dialogical nature of the Christian mission. The Catholic church states:

The Church urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve, and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians. (Fiannery 1975:739)

The church clearly sees a wide openness to the acceptance of the testimonies of other religions in witnessing to them.

The major motivation for missions has been that the unevangelized, regardless of any religious traditions, are doomed unless they consciously believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior. Does universal accessibility reduce this motivation for mission? The question of motivation for mission is an important question.

The Christian missionary enterprise is central to Christian faith, and it must be addressed (Matthew 24:14). But we cannot narrow the motivation for missions to this one thing: deliverance from the judgment of God. We have at times made it the major reason for missions when it is not. The notion that Christian mission is hellfire oriented is at best a half truth. The people of other faiths are not just in the hands of an angry God. Christian mission is not to urge them to turn to Jesus because God hates them and delights in sending them to hell. Jesus did not come to condemn but to save the world (John 3:17). Christian mission is to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). Mission is not based on the assumption that the gospel introduces grace where there was none. Rather, the news of the gospel brings God reconciling the world to Godself in Jesus Christ.

Pinnock asks:

if it is absolutely necessary to call on the name of Jesus to be saved, then how was Job saved? how was Abraham saved, how are the babies dying in infancy saved? If any of these are saved (and the objectors grant that they all are), then according to their view it is not absolutely necessary to hear the gospel and believe on Jesus for salvation. (1992:177)

Coming at missions from the perspective of the kingdom explains why everybody without exception needs to hear the good news, both those who have responded to light and those who have not responded. God wants everybody to be part of the kingdom movement. That implies a mission which calls for a multiplicity of activities designed to initiate people into the kingdom--activities such as proclamation, church planting, social involvement, and Christian presence. The purpose of Christian mission is broad, and its motivation far-reaching. The purpose of Christian mission involves proclamation and church planting, but it also transcends them. Missions are part of God's strategy for transforming the world and changing history. One goal of Christian mission is quantitative, to baptize and form congregations. The other goal is qualitative, to infect people with hope, love, and responsibility for the world (Moltmann 1977:152).

In this connection Pinnock says that the gospel proclamation is not an announcement of terror, but news of God's boundless generosity (1992:178). Our mission is to tell people how good God is, not how frightening God is. The fear of hell is not the primary motivation for mission. The deepest motive of all is to see the kingdom come and God's rule established. Like the early Christians, we go in obedience to the Lord's command, with a concern for the glory of God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

People do not normally acknowledge the Lordship of Christ after a single hearing of the gospel. They need to be given time to find their way to Jesus Christ. "The Spirit is working on the inside *and* the outside of the churches,

pursuing his assignment from the Father to make all things new" (Pinnock 1994:105). The Spirit works with the church and beyond the church. No one institution has a monopoly on the Spirit. The Spirit blows wherever pleases (John 3:8). In this connection Moltmann says, "The Spirit is not concerned about the church as such. He is concerned with the church, as he is with Israel, for the sake of the kingdom of God, the rebirth of life and the new creation of all things" (1992:230).

Pickard shows how the missionary statesman E. Stanley Jones focused not on Christianity or the Christian church or the doctrines and beliefs, but on the person, Jesus Christ. Jones focused more on what Jesus himself preached than on what was preached about Jesus. Jesus preached the kingdom of God or rule of God and himself as its embodiment (Pickard 1998:120-21).

The mission of God is bigger than the mission of the church. It does not exclude the mission of the church, rather it sets it in right perspective. The focus on the mission of God shows the continuous work of the Spirit.¹ So, conversion is not seen as a change of religion, but as a process of discipleship. Jesus' command was to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). In discipling others we are being disciplined as well.

The revelational reality in other religions that emerged from an attempt to understand both the plurality of religions and the particularity Christ in dynamic tension allowed us to see that the Spirit is not confined to the four walls of the church. The Spirit moves beyond the church to advance the kingdom of God.

The church exists by and carries the mission of God, but does not exhaust it.

The mission of God is larger than the mission of the church. As a result, wherever witnesses of Jesus Christ go, the Spirit has gone there first. This understanding of mission creates a positive attitude in us for the people of other faiths. We no longer see them just as sinners who are eternally condemned to hell. We can now see them as the people to whom God has witnessed through the Spirit, and we are there to follow upon the work of the Spirit. We see them not as condemned to hell but as touched by the Spirit. The world is God's parish. Christian mission enters God's parish in the power of the Spirit to witness to people in communities touched by the Spirit. What an encouragement for the mission of the church! What a motivation for the church to be engaged faithfully and persuasively in the mission of God to gather people from every caste, color, and creed so they can experience God's promised salvation in this life and the life to come!

Not that the judgment of God is completely absent as a factor in motivation for mission. Clearly it is a factor of importance not to be excluded from our missionary motives. It should not, however, dominate the mission of the church.

We turn now to examine some implications of holding the dual nature of Christ's mission—proclamation and dialogue—together in a dialectical relational method.

Dialogical Proclamation

Dialogical proclamation is a way to make Jesus Christ known to the people of other faiths. It is not the kind of dialogue² which replaces proclamation. The value and place of dialogue in the Christian mission is certainly not new. Stanley Jones (1884-1973), a great missionary to India, used dialogue with the persons of other faiths in his "Round Table Conferences." In this type of dialogue, the representatives of the various faiths would gather, not for the sake of preaching or seeking to convert others, but simply for sharing their experiences of encountering God in their personal lives (Jones 1928:21). Since Jones discerned the religious aspirations of the people of other faiths, he presented the gospel dialogically. Jones writes:

There was not a single situation that I can remember where, before the close of the Round Table Conference, Christ was not in moral and spiritual command of the situation. . . . There was no drawing of contrasts between the different disclosure of the adherents of the various faiths, no pointing out of superiorities by a clever summing up—we left the statements to speak for themselves, to be their own witness by their own worthwhileness. . . . No one could sit through these Conferences and not feel that Christ was Master of every situation, not by loud assertion, or through the pleading of clever advocates, but by what he is and does. (1928:50-51,56)

This approach is contrary to Calvin's comment that God revealed a little truth to non-Christians to increase their condemnation (Calvin 1960:18).

Methodist mission historian and theologian Kenneth Cracknell finds dialogue prominent in the New Testament (Cracknell 1986:ch2) and prominent evangelical Anglican pastor John R.W. Stott shows Jesus himself engaging in dialogue, or two-way conversation, with others. "He [Jesus] seldom if ever spoke

in declamatory, take-it-or-leave-it style" (1975:61). We must therefore continue this practice.

The proclamation of Christian truths to the people of other faiths demands not only the knowledge of Christian faith, but also the knowledge of other faiths. This knowledge is not for the sake of finding dissimilarities—although dissimilarities are important— and then condemning them, but for finding similarities and building bridges for proper and intelligible communication. For example, in a course in religious studies for Christian mission my apologetic approach and crusading mentality toward Hinduism and Islam were challenged. The book What everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims (1993) by Suzanne Haneef along with my discussion at the Greater Chicago Temple in Chicago and the Lexington Mosque in Lexington challenged my Christian faith and created a greater appreciation for Hinduism and Islam. It almost convinced me to think that the Hindu and Muslims have everything that we Christians do. I realized that Hindu people are serious about their faith and religious activities. They are committed to their gods and goddesses, who are the manifestations of the ultimate reality, and to the teachings laid down in the Vedas and the Bhagvad Gita. Hinduism and Islam demand our non-judgmental and thoughtful learning before we make an attempt to enter into dialogical proclamation.

The question posed to us now is: To what end should I be in dialogue with Hindus or to Muslims? Here is what Dutch missiologist J.H. Bavinck has called the question of elenctics into play—"What have you done with God?" (1960:223).

My study of Hinduism and Islam and my interaction with Hindus and Muslims have challenged me to take their religion seriously on the one hand, and on the other hand have strengthened my own personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Both Hindus and Muslims may be resistant to the gospel, but witness to them is still necessary.

A devout Hindu offers the following prayer every morning: "I am a sinner, a doer of sin, a sinful self, born in sin. O God, save me and take away all my sins" (quoted from memory). Another prayer quite often offered both in private and public is, "From untruth lead me to truth. From darkness lead me to light. From death lead me to immortality" (Brihadarankyaka Upanishad 1.3.28). These two prayers explicitly show that there is a quest in the soul of a Hindu that remains unfulfilled. "The Hindu quest for peace (*shanti*) and bliss is so overwhelming that he is willing to exert extreme effort in a relentless search to find this" (The Thailand Report on Hindus 1980:24).

These signs of quest and longing for God suggest that God is already at work in the Hindu tradition through prevenient grace. Hinduism is not a simplistic, illogical religion. It is a deeply spiritual and mystical religion. It offers to its devotees various ways of reaching and realizing the Supreme Being. Similarly, Islam is a well thought-out, sophisticated, logical religion. It is the religion of the book, and the Quran is a masterpiece of literature. Thus our simplistic approach of street-witness proclamation or distribution of tracts will not be adequate to help Muslims and Hindus comprehend God's love manifested in Jesus Christ for all

humankind. Such an approach is likely to undermine the very activity of prevenient grace by which God makes a point of contact between Godself and humankind. Street preaching or tract distribution methods may have some effect. The Holy Spirit can use any method to fulfill God's purpose. However, I believe that in witnessing to Hindus and Muslims dialogical proclamation will be more effective than other methods.

Mathias Zahniser, a professor of Christian Missions and Religions at Asbury Theological Seminary, in his article "Close Encounter of the Vulnerable Kind: Christian Dialogical Proclamation Among Muslims," shows through a case study how dialogue can lead to conviction and then function as a kind of proclamation. He mentions a long intimate dialogue that took place between a Christian missionary, Ted and a Muslim man, Ahmed (1994:71).³ As a result of this interaction Ted found himself attracted to the family and communal solidarity of Islam. As for Ahmed, God gave him a dream that night. It suggested that the purity he longed for could be found in Christ. Ahmed was a Muslim, however, for whom becoming a Christian meant losing what he held most sacred—his family and his faith. Ted felt Ahmed's anguish deeply.

If Ahmed were to convert, he would lose all that was sacred to him—the faith which had taught him the importance of purity and the family that was the joy of his life. Yet where else could he find the purity that Islam urged upon him but in Christ? Ahmed's family life seemed closer to God's design than Ted's own; and Ahmed's desire for purity and attempts to obtain it, though unfulfilled, seemed to Ted more respectable than his own. Yet he and not Ahmed had found cleansing from sin and inner satisfaction in Christ. (Zahniser 1994:72)

Ted's experience with Ahmed explicitly shows that if Ted and Ahmed had not spent a long hours discussing their faith, Ahmed would not have been faced with a desire to become Christian on the one hand and to be faithful to his family and to purity in his life. Ted was startled by the value of family and purity in Ahmed's life. Both Ted and Ahmed were willing to develop an intimate friendship and facilitate an openness to hear what each one had to say about his faith. Both of them were challenged by the other's religious faith.

Zahniser subscribes to Howe's definition of dialogue: dialogue is then, "the serious address and response between two or more persons, in which the being and truth of each is confronted by the being and truth of the other" (Howe 1963:4; cited in Zahniser 1994:73). Dialogical proclamation, built on the understanding that God is already at work through prevenient grace, does not lead to condemnation of other religions; rather it brings to light some serious issues of life and death here in this present life and the life to come.

Dialogical proclamation is important in witnessing to Hindus and Muslims because of the cross-cultural nature of communication with them. Christians and Hindus often attach different meanings to the same words. For example, the concept of incarnation, for Christians, implies one and once for all, but Hindus understand Jesus as one among many. The concept of the Son of God, for Christians, implies the intimate relationship between God and Jesus, but Muslims understand the Christians to believe that Jesus is the physical son of God. Such errors and misunderstandings can be rectified in dialogical

proclamation. Dialogue facilitates an understanding response to the issues raised in discussion. In the context of dialogue, we are able to give an understanding response to the questions and misconceptions put forth by Hindus and Muslims. Understanding response also helps us choose terms wisely and define them carefully, providing proper understanding and avoiding confusion. Cragg stresses what he calls “the ambition for understanding” (1985a:viii). If we want to be understood, we must first ourselves struggle to understand.

Understanding provides a ground for participation. Once a proper understanding is built between the two faiths, an active participation occurs. That is, both parties are actively involved in discussing the issues that are controversial and beneficial as well. Both parties are open-minded; therefore there is a greater degree of involvement. Dialogue might move from cognitive discussion of issues to a social level of life. A Muslim man who serves as institutional advocate for Rajasthan Bible Institute in Jaipur, India has become good friends with my father-in-law Dr. Anand Chaudhari, president of the Institute. They often enter into religious dialogue. Last summer when I was at home, we invited their entire family for supper. Later, they invited us for their birthday party.

Social life provides an opportunity to participate with other members of the family. It also shortens the relational distance between the two families. Since Hinduism or Islam functions as a complete society, it demands strict conformity

of its members. They are knitted together as a family and society, leaving little scope for independent action. It is extremely important to become acquainted with family members and work through the dynamics of their relationships, remembering that converted family units are essential to the formation and stability of the local church in Hindu or Islamic society.

The theology of religions we advocate here affirms both the plurality of religions and the particularity of Christ, maintaining a dialectical relation between them, entails both a dialogic relationship with Hindus and Muslims that genuinely explores their deepest convictions and an elenctic hope that they will be grasped by the reality of the risen Savior. The intimate dialogue between Ted and Ahmed in Zahniser's case study mentioned above led Ahmed to conviction. The ultimate goal of this kind of participational proclamation can very well be that our partners in dialogue come to the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

Participation may lead to conviction. The ultimate goal of dialogical proclamation is to bring Hindus and Muslims to the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. I believe bringing conviction into someone's life is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is already at work. Bavinck rightly says, "Only the Holy Spirit can do this, even though he can and will use us as instruments in his hand" (1960:222). We are mere instruments. The Holy Spirit uses us to be effective witnesses with the means and methods available to us, but converting people is purely the work of the Holy Spirit, who has already gone before us seeking to fill the God-created vacuum in everyone. This does not mean, however, that we

have no responsibility in bringing about conviction in the lives of people. We continue to remain faithful witnesses while the Spirit of God is working in their lives as well as in ours.

Experiencing Vulnerability in Dialogue

Just as the theology of religions that emerged in Chapter six seems to imply dialogical proclamation, so it also implies that the dialogue itself is likely to be vulnerable. If dialogue is implied by virtue of taking both the horizon of the plurality of religions and the horizon of the particularity of Christ seriously, the vulnerability of the dialogical witness seems to be implied in the dialectical tension involved in holding the two horizons together. Zahniser believes “we experience both (1) the threat of being impacted by the faith and life of our partners in dialogue, and (2) the pain of having put them in a position of anxiety and suffering” (1994:76). It makes sense that taking the other partner’s faith with earnest seriousness and assuming it contains truth would lead to “the threat of being impacted” by it. It likewise makes sense that insisting on the Lordship of the risen Christ would lead the other persons into “a position of anxiety and suffering.”

In other words, in dialogical proclamation, perceived from the perspective of prevenient grace, one experiences vulnerability.

In my understanding, experiencing vulnerability is an essential component in dialogical proclamation. It shows the process of dialogue has reached its culmination. Both parties have been affected and have seen the work of the

Spirit in their lives. They are changed in their perception of themselves and in their relationship to God and one another. From the Christian perspective, Ahmed has been awakened for the first time in his life to realize the need of the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Ted has been challenged probably for the first time to rethink and review his understanding of the people of Islam.

Dialogical proclamation is different from inter-faith dialogue. Interreligious dialogue concerns primarily talking about the religions, their beliefs, and practices. The goal is to get together, understand, and appreciate each other better, which is certainly a noble goal. In dialogue the partners are encouraged “to look for common ideas and values” because the goal of dialogue is “the pursuit of understanding” (Barnes 1989:59,138). The aim of dialogical proclamation is “the presentation of the claims of Christ so as to influence people to trust him for forgiveness and reconciliation with God, with inter-faith dialogue, a mere sharing of information about religion” (Zahniser 1994:73).

The advocates of interreligious dialogue often dislike proclamation. Professor J.G. Davies of Birmingham advocates that dialogue involves complete openness. He says,

To enter into dialogue in this way is not only difficult, it is dangerous. Complete openness means that every time we enter into dialogue our faith is at stake. If I engage in dialogue with a Buddhist and do so with openness I must recognize that the outcome cannot be predetermined either for him or for me. The Buddhist may come to accept Jesus as Lord, but I may come to accept the authority of the Buddha, or even both of us may end up as agnostics. Unless these are real possibilities, neither of us is

being fully open to the other. . . . To live dialogically is to live dangerously. (1967:205)

Leonard Swidler says, "The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly" (1990:43).

Both these proponents, in the context of dialogue, call for an openness but without commitment. They speak of danger and risk, but in inter-faith dialogue one may not experience vulnerability if there is no commitment involved in the proclamation of the risen Christ. Dialogue limited to enhancing understanding of and genuine appreciation for other religions will probably not require vulnerability precisely because Christians engaging in such dialogue do not try to influence their partners to put their trust in Christ for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. If the end result envisioned in dialogue between Christians and people of such other faiths as Hinduism and Islam is to be knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, and, if Christians bring a genuine openness to revelational truth in these other faiths to dialogue, they are likely to experience vulnerability.

Christians engaged in dialogical proclamation should expect to be vulnerable. The Holy Spirit brings vulnerability into our lives in order to make us realize God is at work. God's reconciliation to this world comes in vulnerability. Jesus emptied himself (Philippians 2:5); Jesus bore our sins. Jesus wept (John 11:35). Experiencing vulnerability is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work.

Presence Prior to Proclamation

Taking the plurality of revelations with seriousness leads us to the conviction that the Holy Spirit is working not only during the time of dialogue, but in the lives of people even prior to proclamation. I believe the Spirit was already at work in Ahmed's life even before Ted met him. Newbigin says, "anyone who has an intimate friendship with a devout Hindu or Muslim would find it impossible to believe that the experience of God of which his friend speaks is simply illusion or fraud" (1989:174).

Newbigin's words clearly reflect the need for discernment prior to dialogue. According to Pinnock, "We encounter saints from other religions in daily experience. We are like Abraham in his encounter with Abimelech. He was afraid at first but discovered later that the fear of God was indeed in the man's house. In fact, in the story the pagan behaved more like a believer than the patriarch did (Genesis 20:1-18)" (1995:111). This discernment prior to proclamation explains to me that I am not the first to witness to a Muslim or to a Hindu. God has not left any nation without witness (Acts 14:16-17). God has already witnessed through God's Spirit even prior to my proclamation. God does not send us where God has not been. God does not ask us to witness to someone to whom God has not witnessed. God is God's witness, and we follow up God's witness. Thus, in dialogical proclamation the partners begin to see in the light what was in the darkness. They are awakened and begin to realize the work of the Spirit.

Max Warren beautifully reinforces the importance of discernment prior to proclamation when he writes:

We remember that God has not left himself without witness in any nation at any time. When we approach the man of a faith other than our own, it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understanding of the grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in this encounter. Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More seriously still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival. (1963:10)

John Wesley's theology of prevenient grace affirms that God is already at work in the lives of people. "Prevenient grace, then, marks the beginning of God's work of salvation and this grace is present in all men" (Williams 1960:43). Zahniser says, "given this prevenient gracious activity of God's Spirit that goes on everywhere, it is foolish to proclaim the Gospel without first being sensitive to that activity among the people, or in the person, to whom we direct our witness" (1994:75). According to John Wesley then, it is God's prevenient grace that enables a person to respond to God. This also implies that all people are responsible before God for their salvation (Williams 1960:41). In dialogical proclamation the prior work of God in a person's life is discerned. However, knowing it to be the individual's responsibility to respond to God on the basis of God's grace given to them, we create an opportunity for them to respond to God's grace and be reconciled to God. We should be humble enough to be challenged in many ways by the people of other faiths, but at the same time

convinced and confident in the decisive and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Once we realize that other religions are not excluded from the revelation of God, but God is already at work in those religions, then dialogical proclamation becomes a useful approach for relating to the people of other religious traditions. Our dialogue with the people of other faiths should be one of *commitment with openness*—commitment to Christ and openness to the people of other faiths. We need to bear in mind that other religions too have many good and truthful things to teach us. We cannot close our eyes to the grace we encounter in other religious traditions. The concept of *Bhakti* (devotion) in Hinduism, the concept of the unity of and surrender to God in Islam, the concept of self-denial in Buddhism, and the concept of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) in Jainism are great themes. In dialogue we are committed to Christ but open to new teachings. In dialogue with people of other faiths we learn, and in the process of learning we are changed, not in commitment but in perception. We cannot remain changeless in our perception when we encounter these great themes in different religions. This change does not shake our commitment to Christ, but it makes us understand other persons better in order to bring them to the fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ. Newbigin elucidates this point by giving a classical biblical example of Peter, the evangelist meeting with Cornelius, the Gentile:

We often speak of this as the conversion of Cornelius, but it was equally the conversion of Peter. In that encounter the Holy Spirit shattered Peter's own deeply cherished image of himself as an obedient member of the household of God. It is true that Cornelius

was converted, but it is also true that Christianity was changed.
(1981:19)

In addition, we need to bear in mind that dialogue does not take the place of proclamation. Proclamation is central in Christian mission, even in dialogue. This is the command of Christ to make him known not only through deeds but also through words. There needs to be a point of contact and a point of clarification. In dialogue we are able to clear away prejudices and those ideas which are false or only partly true and in need of correction and explanation (Foreman 1993:338). For example, the doctrine of *Karma* seemingly becomes the barrier to communication of the gospel, but it also opens the door to communicate that through the vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ, people can escape from the cycle of rebirth. Hindu understanding of incarnation is different from Christian understanding. The concept of incarnation for Christians implies God's becoming human once for all, but Hindus understand Jesus as one among many.

In dialogue with the people of other faiths, we need to discern points of contact, points of clarification, and also points of differentiation. The apostle John warns us not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits to see whether they are from God (1 John 4:1). Religions contain both truth and error. It is therefore essential to have a point of differentiation. "Witchcraft and Nazism are not valid responses to the divine, according to the gospel. Religions can be pathways to damnation, and history is the graveyard of the gods" (Pinnock 1995:114). The model of dialogical discernment helps us to discern prior to proclamation where

the Holy Spirit and any demonic spirits are at work. This model helps us to discern what is noble and true, and what is wicked and false in the religions.

Even for religious people who have responded positively to the revelation of God available to them, encounter with Christ will bring assurance and contentment in their present life. People, whether in Christianity or in other religions, who reject God's revelation may suffer eternal death. Christian mission exists in large part to persuade them to respond to God in Christ.

Tolerance is not always a virtue (Gaede 1994). We are not to believe every religious leader or all the teachings of the respective religions, because not everything is from the Spirit. The Spirit is everywhere but not in everything. The life giving Spirit of God is certainly present beyond the domain of the Christian church, nevertheless, not everything in the world, not everything in religion, can be attributed to the Spirit (Pinnock 1995:114; Morse 1994).

In our Christian mission in so far as we have been answering questions not being asked, it is precisely because we have not tried to listen to Hindus or Muslims or Buddhists. Sometimes, we have even considered their religious quest devilish. This has been true at least in part because we have understood the particularity of Christ to be incompatible with involvement on God's part in other religions. A dialectical theology of religions should allow evangelical Christians to understand people of other faiths who are sincerely trying to fulfill their religious quest. This understanding will support both our commitment to Christ and openness to the people of other faiths. Jesus said, "I have come not

to destroy but to fulfill" (John 10:10). In dialogue we respect other persons as fellow human beings and seekers after truth. We need to honor the truth in other religions and be willing to listen to them in order to learn from them (Pinnock 1995:113).

As we discern God's revelation, presence, and gracing activity in the testimony of other religions from the perspective of Christian faith, we begin to understand that God in God's openness opens Godself to the people of other religions. As we are confronted probably for the first time with the work of the Spirit outside of the Christian faith, we discover that the inexhaustible riches of God in Jesus Christ have not yet been fathomed. We begin to see and understand Christ in greater light. From the perspective of non-Christian faiths, when confronted with Christ their experience of God is illuminated and fulfilled in the light of Christ. Our partners in dialogue begin to discern the fulfillment of their faith and search in Jesus Christ. Probably for the first time they are confronted with the greater light outside their own faiths. They discover Christ. We rediscover Christ. Their discovery is salvational, leading to eternal life and citizenship in God's kingdom. Our rediscovery is revelational, leading to a greater understanding of truth and discipleship. The Spirit leads us to all truths and also continues to witness to Jesus the truth.

The Spirit brought Jesus into the world and the Spirit offers Jesus to the world. The unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ therefore illuminates and also is illuminated by the work of the Spirit in the world. This means that Jesus

being an object of the Spirit's activity, becomes the subject of the sending of the Spirit on to the church. The Spirit is the unifying God and the glorifying God. Dialogical discernment thus contributes to a fuller understanding of the whole truth about Jesus Christ. The mission becomes relevant in a religiously pluralistic world without losing its proper understanding of the mystery of God in Christ authenticated in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dialogue becomes fulfilling because in it we participate as learning teachers and discipling disciples.

E. Stanley Jones, whom we have quoted on several occasions, talks about the *disentangled* Christ. This term in fact was introduced by a Hindu college principal who served as chairperson of one of Jones' meetings. In his concluding remarks, the Hindu chairperson said:

Jesus has stood four times in history before the door of India and has knocked. The first time he appeared in the early days he stood in company with a trader. He knocked. We looked out and saw him and liked him, but we didn't like his company, so we shut the door. Later he appeared, with a diplomat on one side and a soldier on the other, and knocked. We looked out and said: 'We like you, but we don't like your company.' Again we shut the door. The third time was when he appeared as the uplifter of the outcastes. We liked him better in this role, but we weren't sure of what was behind it. Was this the religious side of imperialism? Are they conquering us through religion? Again we shut the door. And now he appears before our doors, as tonight, as the disentangled Christ. To this disentangled Christ we say: 'Come in. Our doors are open to you.' (1968:110)

Jones rediscovered in a fresh way this disentangled Christ not by himself but through a Hindu who probably for the first time discovered Christ without any defense and baggage. We defend Christ and entangle him. We entangle him by

setting him against the religions or making him the fulfillment of their religion. We are to risk Christ for Christ's sake. He will stand in his own right. Christ does not need our defense. He can and will defend himself. In defending we lose. In risking we win.

In his last book Jones records: "I once went to speak to the Rotary Club. I sat down alongside a Jewish Rabbi when I finished. I asked him, 'Rabbi, was I too Christian for you today?' He said, 'Oh no. The more Christian you are, the better you'll treat the Jews!'" (1975:66).

Dialogical discernment does not abandon proclamation. It only demands discerning of the prevenient grace prior to proclamation. This method is timely and biblically sound because it is open to the goodness and uprightness found in other religious persons and traditions without forsaking the commitment to proclaim the transforming gospel of the risen Christ.

Like the Chalcedonian model, our dialectical paradigm picks up concerns from pluralists, exclusivists, and inclusivists and gives recognition to both the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions. While affirming openness to other religions, our dialectical paradigm does not lose sight of the missionary nature of Christianity. It affirms both the dialogical and missionary natures of Christianity. Like the dual natures of Christ, the dual natures of his mission are held in tension. Hick's Copernican model expresses the validity of all religions for salvation. In keeping with his view he proposes mutual appreciation for Christian mission in relation to other religions. For him Christian mission is

“mutual mission of sharing experiences and insights, mutual enrichment and . . . cooperation” (D’Costa 1986:28). According to him, the attitude of Christians to the people of other faiths should not be one of pushing for conversion but of mutual learning and togetherness. He places no importance on the missionary nature of Christian mission. Kraemer’s exclusivistic theology of religions does not see many points of contact and similarities in other religions, and thus it loses the dialogical nature of Christian mission. Whereas, Rahner’s conciliar inclusivism perceives all believers as anonymous Christians, regardless of their religious background, and thus it fails to keep intact the missionary nature of Christian mission. The mission model we have called dialogical discernment, based upon a dialectical theology of religions, brings together both the missionary and dialogical natures of Christianity in dynamic tension.

Conclusion

In this study I have attempted to interpret and evaluate contemporary representative proposals for a Christian theology of religions on the basis of the dialectical relational paradigm the historic Christian church has used in formulating its doctrine and practice. In the process, I have developed a dialectical Christian theology of religions which is congruent with this historical model.

I have shown that three prominent approaches to a Christian theology of religions, religious pluralism, Christian exclusivism, and ecumenical inclusivism

resolve the dialectical relation between the particularity of Christ and the plurality of religions.

In an attempt to construct a dialectical Christian theology of religions, I have shown in Chapter six that a dialectical Christian theology of religions, as opposed to the other three types of Christian theology of religions, is congruent with the historical model of dialectical tension. I have provided in Chapter seven a missiological strategy congruent with the dialectical Christian theology of religions, arguing that dialogical discernment holds both the proclamational and dialogical natures of Christian mission together.

The following conclusions emerge from this study: (1) A Christian theology of religions will search out God's revelational and gracing activity in the testimony of other religious traditions. (2) A fresh interpretation of the doctrine of revelation will help us to understand that God in God's openness opens Godself to the people of other religions. (3) The inexhaustible riches of Jesus Christ have not yet been fathomed. Religious pluralism contributes to the fuller understanding of the whole truth about Jesus Christ. (4) Christian faith can become relevant in a context of religious plurality without losing its proper understanding of the mystery of God in Christ and Christ in God authenticated in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (5) A Christian theology of religions is a reflection of the church's life in the world. The church experiences God's revelation both in Jesus Christ and in other religions. Dialogical discernment is a useful approach for relating to the people of other religions with the transforming gospel of the

risen Christ. Dialogue with the people of other faiths is one of “commitment with openness.”

This study on Christian theology of religions is not exhaustive, however. It does not seek to resolve all the issues related to Christian theology and other religions. It provides a creative dimension by which to look into the issues concerned in Christian theology of religions in a dialectical rather than dichotomized or synthesized way. This paradigm could be developed further. One can further explore the issue of revelational plurality understood as both disclosure and discovery. The other issue of importance is the issue of the religion of Israel in the Old Testament. Can the religion of Israel function as analogous to the major religions of the world today? This issue needs further exploration and consideration in a Christian theology of religions. The role and function of the Holy Spirit is quite essential in developing a Christian theology of religions. Spirit christology, on the analogy of the two natures of Christ, can be further researched and developed. Such a work will help us to understand further the dynamic relationship between the independence and interdependence of Son and Spirit in their economy and mission.⁴

I can imagine only one experience more challenging or satisfying than discerning where the Spirit has been at work in the life of an individual or community deeply influenced by a vibrant religious tradition such as Hinduism or Islam. That one experience would be making the living Christ known to that individual or community. It is my profound hope that this study offers readers the

possibility of both *openness* to the activity of God through the Spirit in the religions of the world and *commitment* to sharing the unique, risen Christ with the precious people influenced by these religious traditions. This is what a missiologically informed theology of religions is all about.

¹ See Bosch's discussion on *missio Dei* (1991:389-92).

² Eric Sharpe helps clarify the debate by delineating four major kinds of dialogue: discursive, human, secular, and interior dialogue (1974:77-95).

³ Ted was able to support what the dream revealed from verses in the New Testament. When Ahmed confessed that becoming a Christian would separate him permanently from his family, Ted found it impossible to repeat the verses about forsaking family for Christ. Ted was shocked by what Ahmed perceived to be the cost of purity in Christ (Zahniser 1994:71-77).

⁴ See Taylor (1979) for further research.

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